

# **Deconstructing Workplace Conflict Resolution**

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**Andrew Harris**

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**Attestation of authorship**

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

**Date.....**

**Signature.....**

**Andrew Harris**

## **Abstract**

Conflict is a normal and natural aspect of life. Conflict becomes a problem in organisations when excessive levels of destructive conflict occur. Problematic levels of workplace conflict occur in approximately 10% of organisations. Attempts to address problem levels of destructive conflict are proving ineffective. Even in the US, where there has been widespread implementation of ADR based workplace conflict management systems, levels of destructive workplace conflict are rising. As ADR includes all the options for resolving conflicts, this is a troublesome trend.

A partial explanation for this is that there are many problematic areas in the literature reviewed on workplace conflict. For example, conflict theorists are focusing efforts on trying to consistently achieve win-win outcomes with conflicts that have become escalated and destructive, despite the evidence that once conflict has reached this point, win-win outcomes are unlikely to be achieved. Furthermore it is unrealistic to expect that win-win outcomes can be regularly achieved due to the negotiators' dilemma.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 14 experienced managers and conflict professionals to explore their views on workplace conflict. Results were analysed using a grounded theory approach. Open coding identified significant inconsistency between much of what the conflict literature claimed and what was actually being experienced by managers and conflict professionals. The open and selective coding led to the generation of a grounded theory that problem levels of destructive conflict in organisations are often caused by systemic factors. This is inconsistent with the majority of the literature on workplace conflict, which does not consider that systemic factors play a role in workplace conflict. However this grounded theory is consistent with quantitative research on workplace conflict and mainstream research in psychology.

There seem to be two possible explanations for why many of the conflict theorists reviewed have overlooked the systemic aspects of workplace conflict. One of these is that they accidentally overlooked this dynamic. However the most likely explanation is that they have deliberately chosen to overlook systemic factors role in workplace conflict. An explanation of why they might have done do this comes from a theory of power. This is that the powerful

protect their power through keeping it invisible as if it cannot be recognised then it cannot be challenged. This means the powerful can be expected to encourage conflict to be individualised as a strategy to protect existing power structures.

One practical way to apply the results from this research is identified. This is that the individuals holding the ultimate power in organisations, who are usually the CEOs, should be made personally responsible for the levels of conflict in their organisations.

Potential implications of this research are that it has identified a theory that may help reduce problem levels of destructive workplace conflict both in New Zealand and in other countries experiencing the same workplace conflict dynamics. It has also identified a theory that challenges much of the literature on workplace conflict.

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

The research goals of this thesis are to critically analyse workplace conflict in New Zealand by means of both a literature review and qualitative research. As there is a shortage of literature about workplace conflict in New Zealand the literature review has a global focus although it is limited to conflict literature that is written in English. This is not problematic as New Zealand research indicates that New Zealand experiences similar levels of workplace conflict to other countries (Harris & Crothers, Appendix 2). The CPP Global Human Capital Report (2008) shows that staff in nine countries spend approximately one to three hours a week in conflict. While CPP did not include New Zealand in their study research by Harris and Crothers (Appendix 2) found levels of conflict in New Zealand that were consistent with the CPP figures. This indicates that international literature is likely to be consistent with workplace conflict dynamics in New Zealand.

What is problematic about workplace conflict is that in the US, where there has been widespread introduction into workplaces of alternative dispute resolution (ADR) based conflict management systems, levels of workplace conflict are still increasing (Masters & Albright, 2002). As levels of workplace conflict are similar in New Zealand to America and the methods for dealing with workplace conflict in New Zealand are the same as those in America it is likely that levels of workplace conflict are also rising in New Zealand. This situation, combined with my personal interest in this area, inspired my decision to explore why ADR appears to be failing to stem rising levels of workplace conflict. I decided to take a critical overview of the entire area of workplace conflict in order to try and identify the reason why ADR may be failing. This involved a broad ranging and relatively lengthy literature review. While it was not possible to review all the literature on workplace conflict, the consistency in the views expressed in the literature means it is likely that the literature reviewed was likely to be representative of current thinking in this area. The thesis is divided into five chapters, the first of which is this introduction and describes what is discussed in each chapter.

Chapter two is the literature review and it is divided into nine sections. The chapter begins with a review of different definitions of conflict. It then moves onto a discussion of features of conflict. Conflict is assessed in terms of whether it is a normal part of life or something

unusual and negative. How conflict is differentiated is then discussed. The section concludes with a discussion of what resolution means and a summary of the points covered.

Section 2.2 considers key underlying concepts of conflict resolution. Power is defined and its features examined. Ways of working with power are then discussed. Next critical theory and its views on power are reviewed. Finally dualism is defined and discussed.

Section 2.3 reviews the theoretical background to modern conflict resolution. Attempts to provide a political theory explaining conflict are considered. Next psychological theories of conflict are reviewed. This section attempts to put current conflict resolution thinking into a context that might help the reader better understand some of the conclusions social scientists have arrived at.

Section 2.4 reviews workplace conflict. Firstly aspects of the history of workplace conflict are considered as they provide a context. Next the different sources of workplace conflict are reviewed. This section highlights the lack of consensus that exists amongst social scientists about what the true sources of workplace conflict are. The section concludes by attempting to identify the annual costs of destructive workplace conflict in America in an effort to quantify the size of the destructive workplace conflict problem.

Section 2.5 considers the different strategies for dealing with conflict and identifies the five conflict strategies that seem to have gained consensus support from social scientists. The discussion then focuses on collaboration, the strategy that can potentially deliver win-win outcomes. Phases of conflict and both constructive and destructive patterns of conflict are then considered. Finally conflict escalation is discussed.

Section 2.6 looks at some of the key variables involved with conflict. It begins by considering gender and how gender impacts conflict behaviours. Culture is then discussed and some of the discourses around culture and conflict are considered. The literature pertaining to personality is then assessed and the evidence as to how personality affects conflict behaviour considered. Group personality dynamics are the final area discussed as they have particular relevance for workplace conflict.

Section 2.7 assesses alternative dispute resolution (ADR). It begins with a review of whether the acronym ADR accurately describes what ADR is. The discussion then considers the

reasons that ADR has proven so popular in America. The concept of ADR is then deconstructed and the development of ADR in New Zealand reviewed.

Section 2.8 is dedicated to arbitration and mediation, as they are the two main ADR processes used in New Zealand. Arbitration is briefly defined and its strengths and weaknesses evaluated. However the main focus of the section is on mediation as it is the most important ADR for dealing with workplace conflict in New Zealand. Mediation is defined, its features are described and the mediation process is explained. Next a critical theory perspective of mediation is considered. Finally mediation is deconstructed and the various arguments both in favour of and against mediation are critically analysed.

Section 2.9 reviews training, an area identified in the CPP Global Human Capital Report (2008) as the most effective way in which destructive conflict can be addressed. Evidence is considered showing that training is an effective tool for dealing with destructive conflict. However it is underutilised as only a minority of staff ever receive any training in dealing with conflict.

Section 2.10 concludes the literature review by reviewing the areas covered from the perspectives of the two key concepts identified at its beginning; dualism and power.

Chapter three describes the research methodology. The chapter begins with a discussion of social constructionism. The process as well as the strengths and weaknesses of using a grounded theory approach are then considered. The history of grounded theory is reflected upon as this identifies some of the central issues around this methodology and some of these are reflected on. Next the research objective is identified and participant selection and the challenges that arose in finding suitable participants are discussed. I then deal with data collection, the interviews and data analysis. The chapter concludes with a discussion of data reliability.

Chapter four contains the results and analysis from the coding process. As a grounded theory approach was utilised the chapter was split into the ten themes which were identified by open coding. Each theme contains two sections. The first section identifies the theme and what the participants said that led to this theme being identified. The second section discusses and analyses what was said and what it could mean.

Chapter five contains the grounded theory that emerged from the interviews. Each of the themes identified by open coding that point towards the grounded theory are identified and linked to the grounded theory. The grounded theory is then discussed. The chapter ends with concluding comments that provide an overview of what the thesis identified.

The reference section and appendices follow chapter five.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

### **Section 2.1: Defining conflict**

Burton (1993) contends that conflict resolution is a recent concept that has still not developed a consensual understanding. He says this explains why there is so much disagreement about defining and differentiating conflict. It is true that there are numerous definitions of conflict given by social scientists. For example Folger, Scott, Poole and Stutman (2005, p. 4) define conflict as “The interaction of interdependent people who perceive incompatibility and the possibility of interference from others as a result of this incompatibility”. Hocker and Wilmot (1995) support this definition as they propose one that is almost identical. Tillett and French (2006, p.9) define conflict as “when two or more people perceive that their values or needs are incompatible”. Cahn and Abigail (2007) give a more differentiated definition of conflict, saying it exists when there is a problematic situation, differing perceptions and desired outcomes, interdependence, potential to adversely affect the relationship if unaddressed and a sense of urgency. To further complicate this issue a number of social scientists are unwilling to try to define conflict and instead prefer to describe it by its features (Lulofs & Cahn, 2000; Brandon & Robertson, 2007; Ellis & Anderson, 2005).

What seems clear looking at these definitions is that they all agree that conflict needs to be recognised by at least two parties before it exists. The problem in requiring two parties to recognise there is a conflict before it technically exists is how to deal with situations where only one party believes there is a conflict. This has led Lulofs and Cahn (2000) and Cahn and Abigail (2007) to distinguish real conflicts from unreal and non-substantive conflicts.

Masters and Albright (2002) propose another approach to deal with this issue. They propose that conflict exists when it is felt by psychologically by at least one of the parties, that interdependence is a core aspect of conflict and that conflict can be either real or perceived. The strength in this approach is that it is a simple and all encompassing definition. De Dreu and Gelfand (2008) cite Thomas (1992), Wall and Callister (1995), Van de Vliert (1997) and De Dreu, Harinck & Van Vianen (1999) as supporting this definition of conflict. De Dreu and Gelfand (2008) claim this definition is based on a process view of conflict and requires a distinction between latent and manifest conflict to be made for it to be fully understood.



Latent conflict is that felt or perceived by one party and manifest conflict refers to conflict dynamics that occur between people or groups (De Dreu & Gelfand, 2008).

### **Features of Conflict -Interdependence**

One area of conflict research where there is broad consensus is that a core aspect of conflict resolution is the concept of interdependence ( Masters & Albright, 2002; Lulofs & Cahn, 2000; Ellis & Anderson, 2005; Brandon & Robertson, 2007; Wilmot & Hocker, 2007; Cahn & Abigail, 2007). This is because thinking on conflict resolution has evolved over time from believing it was about dealing with unalterable opposition to thinking it should focus on interdependence (Wilmot & Hocker, 2007).

However while there is broad consensus over the role of interdependence in conflict resolution there are a range of views as to what interdependence actually means. Wilmot and Hocker (2007) claim that if there was no interdependence there would be no conflict. This looks at interdependence as being the need of one party to have the other party change their position. Ellis and Anderson (2005) add to this that interdependence is the core variable that conflict is always based on. They claim the level of interdependence decides whether parties will compete or collaborate in resolving conflicts. The higher the level of interdependence the higher the likelihood that parties will collaborate. This appears slightly simplistic as it assumes that people will only act selfishly. Cahn and Abigail (2007, p.4) assert that “Interdependence occurs when those involved in a relationship characterize it as important and worth the effort to maintain”. This is also problematic as they claim conflict has interdependence as an essential feature. This means from their perspective conflict cannot occur between people who do not have a relationship that they think is “important and worth the effort to maintain” (Cahn & Abigail, 2007, p.4). This appears to be flawed thinking as most of us have experienced conflicts with people we do not have important relationships with. Masters and Albright (2002) provide a definition that overcomes these flaws as they view interdependence as meaning conflict cannot be resolved so that there is a mutually satisfying outcome without mutual effort.

### **Features of Conflict -Conflict is neutral**

There is broad acceptance amongst social scientists that conflict is misperceived and misunderstood by the general public. Examples of social scientists making this point are numerous and include Tillett and French (2006), Tillett (1999), Lulofs and Cahn (2000), Ellis and Anderson (2005), Stitt (1998), Lipsky, Seeber and Fincher (2003), Eunson (2007) and Cahn and Abigail, (2007). Lulofs and Cahn (2000) and Cahn and Abigail (2007) claim conflict is often incorrectly perceived as a disruption of the normal function of society. Brandon and Robertson (2007) claim people tend to incorrectly perceive conflict as negative and use the word “conflict” to label situations that are not really conflicts.

With so many social scientists claiming the general public misconceives conflict, it is worthwhile reflecting on why the public have made this mistake. One useful explanation comes from Masters and Albright (2002), who contend that conflict can occur before any conflict behaviours become evident. According to Masters and Albright (2002) conflict exists at the moment that one party feels disagreement. At that moment the conflict is neither constructive (positive) nor destructive (negative), it is best looked at as neutral. It is what happens subsequently, how the parties choose to behave once they realize that there is a conflict, which determines whether the conflict manifests positively or negatively. The implications of this are significant as it means that what happens subsequent to that moment of conflict, where disagreement is felt psychologically by one of the parties is a result of the conflict rather than being the conflict itself. Tillett and French (2006, p.1) make this point well “Fighting and arguing should not be looked at as being conflict but as responses to or manifestations of conflict”.

### **Features of Conflict -Conflict is a normal part of life**

Most researchers accept that conflict is a normal part of life (Tillett & French, 2006; Tillett, 1999; Stitt, 1998; Lulofs & Cahn, 2000; Brandon & Robertson, 2007; Ellis & Anderson, 2005; Eunson, 2007; Masters & Albright, 2002; Cahn & Abigail, 2007). However some go further and claim that it is in fact an essential part of life. Burton (1972, pp.137-138) states:

Conflict, like sex is an essential creative element in human relationships. It is the means to change, the means by which our social values of welfare, security, justice and opportunities for personal development can be achieved....The existence of a

flow of conflict is the only guarantee that the aspirations of society will be attained. Indeed, conflict, like sex is to be enjoyed.

This view that conflict is an essential aspect of life that has the potential to be a positive experience is shared by a number of social scientists. Tillett and French (2006) state that conflict can encourage dialogues, assist with personal and professional growth, provide opportunities for problems to be solved and prevent stagnation. Eunson (2007) claims conflict can challenge complacency in a useful manner and is often an engine of change. These views are consistent with systems theory which sees conflict as essential for development and warns that without conflict there would be stagnation and decay (Cahn & Abigail, 2007).

### **Differentiating Conflict: Simple disagreements, problems, disputes and conflicts**

There is very little consensus amongst social scientists on how to differentiate amongst conflicts. Burton (2000) differentiates between disputes and conflicts on the basis that disputes involve negotiable positions while conflicts involve non-negotiable positions. A problem with Burton's approach is that by his definition conflicts cannot be resolved through negotiation and yet this is exactly what he then proposes can occur.

Tillett and French (2000) contend that there are three levels of differences. Problems which they describe as being able to be dealt with by management, disputes which can be settled and conflicts which differ from the others as they can exist without a specific focus and relate to underlying human needs and values. Brandon and Robertson (2005) agree that there are three classes of differences; problems, disputes and conflicts, however they differentiate them differently. They describe problems as issues that need to be addressed that become conflicts if they are not attended to. Disputes are narrowly focused while conflicts are more broadly focused and tend to be about human relations. Lulofs and Cahn (2000) also differentiate conflict in three ways, beginning with a simple disagreement, which then becomes an argument and then escalates into a conflict. They make a distinction between disagreements and conflicts, claiming that the relationship between the parties is not affected by mere disagreements but is by conflicts.

A major flaw with all these approaches is that they all assume that conflict is destructive and so attempt to differentiate it according to its level of destructiveness. As conflict can be

resolved constructively these definitions leave no room for constructive conflict to exist alongside them. Secondly the lack of consensus indicates that the lines are blurred between the various categories. This means that it will be very difficult to identify where one type of difference ends and another begins. For example Brandon and Robertson's (2005) differentiation of conflicts as being more broadly focused than disputes raises the issue of where exactly the line lies between the two. It appears in this case that it would be almost impossible to set a clear boundary. A final problem with this approach is that the conflict behaviours involved with each level of differences are the same. This suggests that there is no sound underlying theoretical reason for differentiating conflict according to the level of destructive conflict that occurs.

### **So how should conflict be defined?**

Masters and Albright (2002) do not try to distinguish between disagreements, problems, disputes and conflicts. Their view is that all of these are conflicts. This approach means that constructive conflict is not excluded from their definition of conflict and that there is no need to seek clear boundaries between different levels of conflict. This provides a simple and easy to understand solution to the issues social scientists have been debating as to how to differentiate between conflicts based on their level of destructiveness. This is that conflict should not be differentiated this way.

The potential problem with using conflict as an umbrella term that covers all disagreements is that it may create confusion as to which nuance of the word conflict is meant each time it is used. Cahn and Abigail (2007, p.251) suggest a way to partially address this problem as they define a dispute as "a conflict that has reached the point where the parties are unable to resolve the issue by themselves". This definition fits well with the Masters and Albright definition of conflict as it identifies disputes as conflicts. It also does not implicitly exclude constructive conflict and it establishes a clear boundary between conflicts and disputes.

## **Types of conflict**

There is also very little consensus amongst social scientists as to how conflict should be differentiated according to types of conflict. Lulofs and Cahn (2000) describe four types of conflicts, unreal conflicts, nonsubstantive conflicts, mere disagreements and real and substantive conflicts. Unreal conflicts refer to those that are perceived by one person but do not exist or do exist but are misperceived by those involved. Examples of unreal conflicts they describe include false conflicts, where only one side believes there is a conflict, displaced conflicts, where conflict is directed toward the wrong person and misplaced conflict, where parties debate an issue that is not at the core of the conflict. Nonsubstantive conflicts involve behaviours like bickering, aggression and competition, where there is no real issue involved. Finally they describe substantive conflicts as those where there is a real issue involved.

Ellis and Anderson (2005) claim there are three types of conflict; interest conflicts which stem from scarcity, value conflicts which stem from cultural differences and cognitive conflicts which stem from either misunderstanding, disagreement over facts and differing world views or ideas about how to achieve results. Tillett and French (2005) and Tillett (1999) identify types of conflict determined on the basis of relationship with categories radiating out from the individual. Types of conflict they describe are domestic relationship conflict, family conflict, neighbourhood conflict, employment conflict, commercial conflict, consumer conflict, environmental conflict, multiparty conflict and international conflict. While Tillett and French (2005) and Tillett (1999) see workplace conflict as a separate category of conflict they do not describe workplace conflict as having any particularly unique characteristics. Folger et al., (2005) take yet another approach as they differentiate types of conflict according to the numbers of people involved. This means they see conflict between individuals, between individuals and groups and between groups as three different types of conflict.

Considering these differing approaches it seems that both the relative immaturity of modern conflict resolution and the absence of an accepted theoretical explanation of conflict contribute to the lack of consensus as to what types of conflict actually exist. It also appears that none of these approaches is particularly robust. Folger et al. (2005) do not answer why conflict between individuals and groups should be looked at as a different class of conflict to

that between individuals, when both could be dealing with the same issue. With Tillett and French (2006) a similar criticism can be made. For example if there are both relationship and family conflicts about the same issue and they result in the same conflict behaviours then why are they different types of conflicts? With Lulofs and Cahn (2000) it can be asked if there is both an nonsubstantive conflict and a substantive conflict over the same issue then why are they different types of conflict? Ellis and Anderson's position is also questionable; if there are cognitive and value conflicts that result in the same conflict behaviours then why should they be looked at as different types of conflicts.

The main flaw with all these efforts at differentiation is that, as will be demonstrated later in this thesis, what occurs in every situation tends to involve the same dynamics, making it almost impossible to delineate a clear line between one type of conflict and the next. As one approach may be effective across a broad range of differentiated conflicts the grounds for differentiating between them are shaky at best. Tjosvold (2008) claims attempts to categorize conflict types have been made in an effort to distinguish constructive and destructive sources of conflict and that researchers who do this do not appreciate the weakness with this approach. Tjosvold (2008) says the main weakness is that all categories are arbitrary and it is impossible to say whether conceptualising three types of conflict is better than five or more. A further weakness is that having types of conflict fits stereotypes about the value of rationality and the obstructive role of feelings in conflict situations. Tjosvold (2008) asserts these stereotypes are incorrect as "dealing with conflict requires an integration of our rational and emotional sides" (Tjosvold, 2008 p.449). He claims for this reason types of conflict should not be taken too seriously.

## **Resolution**

Many social scientists do not bother to define what is meant by the word *resolution* in the context of conflict resolution, assuming that the everyday meaning is adequate (Tillett & French, 2006; Brandon & Robertson, 2005). However amongst those that do attempt to define resolution, Burton (1990) distinguishes settlement from resolution by claiming settlements were negotiated outcomes while resolutions were outcomes that satisfied the needs of all parties. Cahn and Abigail (2007) and Lulofs and Cahn (2000) agree with Burton as they say that for a conflict to be resolved both parties must be happy with the outcome.

Their position is that conflict can only be resolved if it delivers win-win outcomes. If the outcome is a win-loss one where one side is dissatisfied with the outcome then they contend the conflict has not been resolved but has been managed. Lulofs and Cahn (2000) claim that managed conflicts have as a characteristic that they are likely to recur again in the future because they have not been resolved.

### **Concluding comments**

The efforts by social scientists to differentiate conflict are impressive. Social scientists have tried numerous approaches to differentiate conflict. These include differentiating conflict according to where it occurs, according to what the subject of the conflict is, on the basis of relationship, on the basis of the numbers involved on either side, on the basis of whether it is real or unreal, on the basis of how serious the conflict is and on the basis of the actual conflict behaviours being displayed in the conflicts. However the lack of consensus on this issue and the fact that none of the attempts to differentiate conflict seems to have significantly more merit than the others has resulted in a state of confusion on this issue. The Masters and Albright (2002) definition that conflict exists whenever disagreement is felt psychologically by at least one of the parties is a simple definition that provides a solution to this confusing situation by implying it is unnecessary to differentiate conflict.

The Masters and Albright (2002) definition of conflict is however a little too simplistic. De Dreu and Gelfand (2008) point out that this definition needs a distinction to be made between latent and manifest conflict for it to be complete. Cahn and Abigail (2007) suggest that disputes should be defined as conflicts that the parties need help in resolving. The result of combining these three positions appears to be a differentiated definition of conflict that answers all the major criticisms. This definition is also consistent with the evidence showing conflict is normal rather than being purely a negative experience.

This definition means that workplace conflict is not a standalone category of conflict. It is subject to the same dynamics and influences that apply to all conflict in all locations between all groups and individuals. This means that the basic techniques for resolving workplace conflict are the basic techniques that will help solve all conflicts.

Having considered how conflict should be defined it is appropriate to consider key concepts associated with conflict. Power and dualism are two often overlooked factors that are present in many conflicts. An understanding of them is therefore useful.

## **Section 2.2: Key Concepts - Power and dualism.**

### **Power**

Folger, Scott Poole and Stutman (2005) claim that the moves and countermoves involved in conflicts are dependent on the amount of power the parties have. This indicates that power needs to be considered a key concept of conflict. Hocker and Wilmot (1995) illustrate the importance of power by claiming it is such an important aspect of conflict it is comparable in its relationship to conflict to the relationship between energy and physics. This means any discussion of conflict should include a discussion of power.

However while some conflict theorists believe power is a critical aspect of conflict others do not consider it particularly important (Burton, 1990; Lulofs & Cahn, 2000; Cahn & Abigail, 2007; Tillett & French, 2006 and Ellis & Anderson, 2005). The likely reason why these theorists overlook the importance of power requires an understanding of the dynamics of power. Thus it is best to first discuss power and then return to this issue later in this section.

### **Defining Power**

Power is given a range of definitions by social scientists. Folger et al. (2005, p.108) define power as the “ability to influence or control events”. Another definition is: “Power is the capacity to gain whatever resources are necessary to remove oneself from a condition of oppression, to guarantee one’s ability to perform and to affect not only one’s circumstances, but also more general circumstances outside one’s surroundings” (Goodrich, 1991, p.10).

However as this thesis is on workplace conflict it is important to understand what organisational power is. Lawrence and Robinson (2007, p.380) provide a useful definition: “Organizational power reflects actions of any individual or organizational system that controls the behaviour or beliefs of an organizational member.” This definition is important as they identify how systems and those holding power within systems can control the



behaviour of members through power. This type of power can be described as *systemic*. *Systemic* is defined in The Penguin Dictionary of Psychology (2001, p.734) as “Generally pertaining to a system” and system is defined on the same page as “An organised whole”. Thus the power of the owners and leaders of an organisation, as well as the power structures within an organisation are systemic factors.

While these definitions of power are consistent with commonly held understandings of power there is one feature of power that is not widely appreciated. This is that “power must be endorsed by others in a group to be a basis of successful influence” (Folger et al. 2005, p.128). This aspect means power needs to be carefully used if it is to be effective.

Hocker and Wilmot (1995) point out that power can be constructive or destructive in the same way that conflict can be either constructive or destructive. In the workplace the issue of power is perhaps even more important than in most other contexts. This is because in the workplace there is a power imbalance between the employer and the employees. According to Hocker and Wilmot (1995) this power imbalance in the workplace is the most serious challenge facing workplace conflict professionals. Folger et al. (2005) claim there is widespread agreement amongst social scientists that any notable imbalance of power poses a major threat to constructive conflict resolution. Hocker and Wilmot (1995) assert that power imbalances lead to conflict imbalances and corruption. They contend that constant feelings of power can bring unwanted consequences. These include an individual becoming addicted to power, being tempted to act unethically, getting false feedback concerning their own value and tending to devalue the less powerful. Folger et al. (2005) add that holding more power than the other party is usually seen as a competitive advantage. They then say that the use of power in conflict is far more complex and self threatening than most people realize. The main reason they give in support of this claim is that as power needs to be endorsed by others in a group to be the basis of successful influence so unfairly used power can lead to erosion of power once it is used.

According to May (1972) while the major danger in having more power than another is that it can corrupt so powerlessness can also corrupt. Hocker and Wilmot (1995) argue that this happens because continued losing by the powerless leads to feelings of frustration, apathy or aggression. Folger et al. (2005) see the main danger with being in a weaker position being that the weaker parties’ needs will not be seen as legitimate. Another danger is that the more

powerful party may be able to use their power to define the terms of the conflict. Finally there is a tendency for weakness to become self defeating and self perpetuating and this can lead people to become desperate (Folger et al. 2005). Hocker and Wilmot (1995) point out that in severe and repetitive conflicts both parties feel low power and continually try to increase their power by acting competitively. In these cases nobody wins.

### **Working with Power**

Folger et al. (2005) view power as an area that people and organisations try to avoid looking at. They say the main reason for this is that power contradicts society's emphasis on equality and democracy and this means it is not socially sanctioned. In addition to this the powerful try to prevent those they have power over becoming too aware of their power. This is because through overtly identifying their power they risk alienating the people whose endorsement is required for power to exist. "If weaker parties cannot see the power, or if they do not understand how it works, they can do nothing to upset the present balance" (Folger et al. 2005, p.136).

Folger et al. (2005) believe that to work productively with power in conflict requires that the parties' understand how power is operating with regards to their situation. This involves overcoming the efforts of those in power to keep their power out of sight, as described in the previous paragraph. Once this has occurred the parties can move towards what they describe as shared power and Walton (1969) describes as productive power balancing.

There are a number of options for achieving power balancing. Hocker and Wilmot (1995) firstly describe using restraint. This refers to the powerful limiting their power by refusing to use it. Furthermore if the less powerful focus on the interdependence that exists between them and the powerful rather than their own interests they can to some degree balance the power in the relationship. Hocker and Wilmot (1995) claim the less powerful can also use perseverance to balance power, slowly working to achieve goals that will not be achieved through confrontation. They say the low powered can also present their position in a balanced manner, acknowledging strengths as well as weaknesses and that occasionally the higher powered person can address this issue by empowering the lower powered one, a process that also can occur when third parties are involved. The final approach they advocate is

‘metacommunication’, a term they define as transcending win-lose by jointly working to preserve the relationship during conflict.

Folger et al. (2005) take a slightly different approach. They focus on the conditions necessary for power sharing to develop. They advocate parties openly discussing power and identify which uses of power are acceptable to them and which they find threatening. They can then change the situation so that the acceptable uses of power are allowed and those that are threatening are excluded. Finally weaker parties should group together and pool their power in order to achieve a stalemate that will lead to structural changes in a relationship.

None of the arguments advanced by Folger et al. (2005) and Hocker and Wilmot (1995) are convincing. They all require the party with the power to agree to change the status quo and as this is the source of their power, this is often difficult to achieve (Weber, 1948). This means that it is more likely that organisations will try to keep their power rather than share it and there is evidence that this is the case. For example Kolb (2008) argues that there is a tendency for organisations to try to keep disputes at the individual level and that this is in fact a power holding strategy. This is because there is research showing that if conflicts can be kept at the individual level there is a higher likelihood that existing power structures will remain intact (Donellon & Kolb, 1994).

## **Critical Theory and Power**

Any discussion of power in conflict resolution implicitly involves looking at critical theory as power in social relationships is the core concept around which critical theory is built (Hansen, 2008). Critical theory has been attributed to Marx and Engels who looked at how societies formed hierarchies in which power was used by the elite to control the powerless by creating a ‘false consciousness’ where they supported the interests of the powerful as if they were their own interests (Scimecca, 1993).

Foucault (1994a) considers that Marx and Engels took too simplistic a view of power. Foucault (1994b) argues that power could be used either productively or repressively and that those members of society who controlled language also controlled power. This was because they could decide how social phenomena were named and discussed and these formed the truth of the society. Foucault (1976) sees power as an effect of discourse rather than as

something that some people have and others lack. He links power to knowledge and defines knowledge as the version of a phenomenon that is seen as true in our society at a particular time. Thus the ability to control discourse is also the ability to control knowledge. Discourse is a core concept of social constructionism that has two meanings according to Burr (2003). These are to refer to spoken interaction between people and to refer to a systematic set of concepts, images and metaphors that construct an object in a particular way. She gives as an example foxhunting as pest control and foxhunting as the contravention of basic morality as two discourses about foxhunting. As Burr (2003) says discourse is reality she implies that from a social constructionist perspective conflict occurs when there are two differing discourses about the same phenomenon.

Foucault claims that the individual as we understand it today is the result of discourses that emerged from the social practices that have arisen over the last hundred years. These discourses control and manage society efficiently and without the use of force through what Foucault (1976) calls *disciplinary power*.

Foucault believes there has been a radical shift in how western societies are controlled. This has been from sovereign power, where a ruler used their power overtly to force people to his or her will, to disciplinary power. He explains disciplinary power as being due to discourses that have encouraged people to self monitor their behaviour. Discourses identifying various mental illnesses or establishing behavioural norms are examples of discourses that encourage people to monitor their own behaviour. Foucault (1976) says disciplinary power is efficient as people subscribe to it willingly and do not recognise that they are being controlled by it. This view implies that social sciences that identify behaviour norms may be tools of societal control. It is ironic that this line of thinking in social constructionism challenges the very foundations of social science.

Foucault (1976) stressed how disciplinary power needs to remain hidden:

Power is tolerable only on condition that it masks a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms (Foucault, 1976, p.86).

Foucault (1994) believes social discourse changes society rather than revolution and that change occurs by challenging common understandings through language and analysis. Freire (1997) points out that social discourse is usually controlled by elites who use it to limit

critical analysis in order to protect their positions of power. Freire (1997) says this approach is a form of violence against the powerless that must be overcome in order for there to be a just society. He suggests that teaching critical thinking in schools could overcome this use of power by the elites. This form of education would lead individuals to reach a 'critical consciousness' which would enable them to actively participate in cocreating social reality, a process Freire and Foucault describe as 'praxis'. Freire would no doubt be heartened by the recent emergence of internet based social networking sites that have taken some social discourse out of the control of the elites.

### **Concluding comments**

Power needs to remain hidden as it requires endorsement from those it is exercised over to be effective (Folger et al. 2005). This means organisations can be expected to try to hide power. One way this occurs with workplace conflict is that organisations individualise conflict as a power holding strategy (Kolb, 2008). Individualising conflict hides the role of power in conflict. Freire's (1997) identification of how the powerful control discourse to protect their power means that the powerful can also be expected to use their power to create discourses that divert attention away from the role of power as a systemic factor in workplace conflict and refocus attention on individualised factors.

There is some evidence that this is occurring. This is because many conflict theorists downplay the importance of power and do not identify it as being a systemic issue. For example one has to reach the middle of the books by both Lulofs and Cahn (2000) and Cahn and Abigail (2007) before power is even addressed. Then it is only briefly discussed and the point made that power imbalances between individuals can be problematic. Tillett and French (2005) and Brandon and Robertson (2007) take the same position, ignoring the significance of power as a systemic factor in conflict and focusing on power imbalances between individuals in their commentaries. What these conflict theorists are doing is attempting to label power as an individualised issue in conflict. Brandon and Robertson (2007) have a particularly problematic position as they devoted their book specifically to workplace conflict. The other authors take a broader focus, including workplace conflict as well as other forms of interpersonal conflict in their discussions.

What is surprising about their position is that there appears to be little or no research supporting it. The workplace conflict research identified in this literature review consistently found that systemic factors are a crucial aspect of workplace conflict. For example the CPP Global Human Capital Report (2008) and Bentley, Catley, Cooper-Thomas, Gardner, O'Driscoll & Trenberth (2009) collectively utilised nearly 7000 participants in quantitative research on workplace conflict in both New Zealand and globally. They both found evidence that systemic factors are a key aspect of workplace conflict. Their findings are discussed in detail later in this literature review. This means that the likely reason that there is a group of conflict theorists that overlook the importance of systemic power issues in all conflict is that they have been influenced by the subtle forces of power to do so.

## **Dualism**

According to Del Collins (2005) the problem of destructive conflict in Western civilization has its origins in dualism, "a doctrine espousing that everything in the universe is divided into polar opposites" (Del Collins, 2005, p. 263). She identifies right and wrong, winners and losers and true and false as examples of dualistic concepts that have become entrenched in western society. Dualistic thinking has a tendency to overlook the complexities of situations and be overly simplistic (Del Collins, 2005).

The dualistic thinking that if there is a winner there should be a loser creates a major problem when it is applied to conflict resolution. This is that the cooperative and collaborative conflict behaviours that can lead to win-win outcomes are not possible when one of the parties has a dualistic win-loss mindset. Lulofs and Cahn (2000) assert that it is only through achieving win-win outcomes that conflicts can be resolved. This means that dualistic win-loss thinking represents a serious obstacle to conflict resolution occurring. Without an understanding of dualism it is not possible to fully appreciate what conflict resolution needs to overcome if it is to occur.

## **History of dualism**

Dualism is so old it is difficult to date its beginnings. Korzybski (1933) claims that most societies have a dualistic belief system because that is how the world appears on a gross level. Ancient Greek philosophers applied a dualistic approach in recording human history and based their socio-political ideas on dualism (Del Collins, 2005). Aristotle is perhaps the early Greek philosopher who was most aligned with dualism as his logic in 'Laws of identity' requires dualistic thinking to make it plausible (Del Collins, 2005). She states that while dualism emerged from the apparent binaries of nature it is also socially constructed as it was driven by early humans' needs to create some sort of order out of nature. Dualism led to an 'either or' logic emerging early in history that was even integrated into Christianity through such beliefs as good and evil and heaven and hell (Schlain, 1991).

## **Dualism is a dominant frame of reference in society**

Del Collins (2005) says dualism is a dominant frame of reference found in all forms of social discourse. To give an idea of the entrenched nature of dualistic thought Bauman (1991) points out both that language helps shape our reality and that there is a dualistic assumption behind the English language. Some good examples of dualistic language are the dyads of words good and evil, winner and loser, and male and female. There is an underlying dualistic assumption with these pairings that people are either one or the other.

However, even with gender this apparent duality is inaccurate. This is because science has proven that there are not just males and females in the world. Tauches (2007) and Haviland, Prins, Walrath and McBride (2005) claim that the words male and female do not apply to all individuals and that a considerable number are intersexuals - people born with chromosomes, hormones and genitalia that are not exclusively male or female. Haviland et al. (2005) assert that around 1% of the world's population is intersexual, which means there are around 60 million intersexuals in the world. This example shows how dualism can create over simplified realities. However even though it is easy to see its weaknesses the combination of dualism reinforced by language is a powerful one to confront as is hard to see beyond (Bloch, 2003). Burr (2003, p.8) explains just how powerful language is from a social constructionist perspective:

Concepts and categories are acquired by each person as they develop the use of language. This means that the way a person thinks is provided by the language that they use. Language therefore is a necessary precondition for thought as we know it.

### **Problems with dualistic thinking**

While it has already been shown that dualistic thinking tends to create over simplified realities, Del Collins (2005) uses a metaphoric question to highlight additional flaws. This is that if a fish knows only its pond and a dragonfly knows the universe which would you rather be? Del Collins (2005) says that this question demonstrates dualism as it limits the options to one of two choices, pressures the respondent to answer in a time frame, implies that one is better than the other, encourages discrimination, confuses human made values with the laws of nature and reduces the choice to either or and in this way does not recognize ambiguity.

### **The forces confronting dualism**

Del Collins (2005) says that while language and ancient cultures support dualism, the forces confronting dualism are also powerful and are led by developments in science and technology. She cites a range of scientific theories from diverse disciplines to demonstrate a pattern of science overcoming dualism. Fuzzy thinking, field theory, general semantics, chaos theory and quantum mechanics as scientific theories that undermine the basic assumptions of dualism.

Perhaps the best known modern opponent of dualistic thinking is Einstein who said:

A human being is part of a whole, called by us “universe”, a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest- a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. The delusion is a prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty” (Darling, 1996, p.156).

Einstein’s comments are profound as he challenges one of the core aspects of dualism, the simplistic idea of either self or other that makes us think we can benefit by acting selfishly or competitively. In identifying developing compassion as the way to escape from the ‘prison’



of dualistic thinking about self and other Einstein implies that a shift in consciousness is necessary to overcome the delusion of this aspect of duality.

The idea that selfish (dualistic) thinking is a major obstacle to successful conflict resolution is a core theme of this thesis. It will be shown in this thesis that competitive approaches to conflict, which are inherently disrespectful of others and based on dualistic thinking, prevent conflict resolution from occurring and are invariably destructive (Wertheim, Love, Peck & Littlefield, 1998). If parties are prepared to collaborate, which requires them avoiding dualistic win-loss thinking patterns, only then is it possible for conflicts to be resolved (Lulofs & Cahn, 2000).

### **Why dualistic thinking poses such an obstacle to conflict resolution**

Non-dualistic approaches involving collaboration in conflict situations are theoretically appealing. However in practice they are very difficult to achieve. The reason for this is best understood by considering the negotiators' dilemma (Lax & Sibenius, 1986). The essence of the negotiators dilemma is that competition offers the parties to a collaborative process relative gains over each other and this is something that both sides know, making collaboration risky and competition safe (Axelrod, 1984). This challenges the idea of collaborative conflict resolution by showing it is vulnerable to competitive tactics (Lax & Sibenius, 1986). The negotiators dilemma provides a compelling reason for parties behaving competitively (dualistically) during the collaborative negotiations that are essential for conflict resolution. The major challenge that conflict theorists who advocate collaborative processes need to overcome appears to be the negotiators dilemma.

### **Concluding comments**

It is important to acknowledge that conflicts being decided by third parties such as judges and arbitrators mean that parties can remain in dualistic patterns of thought and still deal with conflicts. However for both sides to be satisfied with the outcome of a conflict requires them to stop thinking competitively and start thinking collaboratively (Lulofs and Cahn, 2000). The negotiators dilemma shows that with conflict resolution the reasons for parties using

dualistic competitive behaviours are valid and compelling. This raises the issue of whether dualism can actually be overcome or whether it is an essential feature of life that helps explain the human condition. Einstein suggests it is the former and that compassion is the tool that will enable us to overcome dualism. However if it is the latter then it is unlikely that a conflict resolution process that consistently delivers win-win outcomes will ever be developed.

### **The relationship between dualism and power**

The relationship between dualism and power appears to be the key to determining whether power is a constructive or destructive force. Later in this literature review it will be shown that when the parties act competitively, demonstrating dualistic thinking in conflict situations, the inevitable result is destructive conflict (Wertheim et al. 1998). It appears the same is true with power. When the powerful use their power selfishly (dualistically) then power becomes destructive. However power coupled with a collaborative approach will be shown in this literature review to tend to be constructive.

Having identified and discussed the key concepts of power and dualism it is appropriate to now consider the background to modern conflict resolution. This process will put the various schools of thought into some sort of context. This is important because many of the views that social scientists have about conflict resolution only make sense if one understands the history behind them.

## **Section 2.3: Background to modern conflict resolution**

### **History**

According to Scimecca (1993) the modern conflict resolution movement has its roots in the writings of Karl Marx and Max Weber. Marx identified the conflict that exists between the bourgeoisie and proletariat as eventually leading to revolution. He identified conflict as being the driving force of revolution (Scimecca, 1993). While history has shown Marx was partly mistaken in this view his thoughts on conflict were built on by Max Weber (Scimecca, 1993).

Weber (1948) focused on power when considering conflict, explaining how power is legitimized in society and claiming that conflict is actually derived from social power. Weber (1948) argued that the distribution of power was an ongoing problem for society. He said that as power based on coercion was ineffective it required both power to be seen as legitimate and those holding power to be seen as deserving in order to hold society together.

Weber (1948) viewed social life as a struggle for power over others. He claims this struggle inevitably leads to a hierarchy forming within society, with the powerful at the top. According to Weber (1948) this hierarchy will over time become legitimized and it is this legitimacy that holds the society together. He states that both the social structure and normative systems of society are more influenced by the powerful (those at the top of the hierarchy) than the less powerful. This means social systems increasingly reflect the interests of the more powerful while maintaining an appearance of legitimacy. This occurs because governments constantly seek to reinforce their legitimacy and in this way convince members of society to accept social order, even though it favours the interests of the more powerful. Weber's (1948) view of conflict was that it was caused by competition for scarce resources, a situation that inevitably occurred as social systems developed and the powerful used them to accumulate resources at the expense of the less powerful.

Due to this background there has been a tendency amongst social scientists to define conflict in a way that is consistent with Weber. The surest sign of Weber's influence is when conflict is narrowly defined to exclude all but the most serious of disagreements. Examples of social scientists who have defined conflict in this way include Burton (1990), Lulofs and Cahn (2000), Cahn and Abigail (2007), Tillett and French (2006) and Ellis and Anderson (2005). However Weber's influence on conflict research has been inconsistent. This is because his view that conflict in society was due to systemic factors has apparently not influenced social scientists to view conflict as being caused by systemic factors. The vast majority of conflict theorists identified in this literature review did not acknowledge that systemic factors could cause conflict.

## **Political theories of conflict**

Due to the influence of Weber (1948) at the early phase of its evolution modern conflict theory was a political theory. Burton (1993) accepted this and introduced his own political theory based on human needs. He cites Banks (1986) who describes the evolution of conflict resolution from feudal times to the present and then suggests that the traditional power based approach of governing through coercion is less realistic than the approach of the idealists who believed in cooperative relationships. Burton (1993) points out that as there was no theory the idealists could identify to explain conflict the result was a void. This is because the theory of power being used to resolve conflict has according to Burton failed and no other theory has emerged to replace it.

Burton did not provide an explanation of why Weber's power theory had failed apart from making an assertion that power was of no relevance in conflict resolution. Weber's (1948) theory appears to be a very insightful reflection of the dynamics of political power and seems as valid today as when it was first proposed. However it seems that Weber, in providing a political theory of conflict, may have looked at conflict too narrowly. This is because most researchers now agree that conflict is a normal function of society (Tillett & French, 2006; Tillett, 1999; Lulofs & Cahn, 2000; Ellis & Anderson, 2005; Eunson, 2007; Cahn & Abigail, 2007). This view is dealt with later in this thesis and is encapsulated by systems theory which views conflict as one of the dominant forces of change in life. Systems theory sees conflict as more natural and prevalent than any political theory allows (Lulofs & Cahn, 2000).

Burton (1990) believed that what was needed was a theory of behaviour that explains conflict and that once this had been identified it would be possible to develop appropriate means for handling it. Burton proposed a genetically based human needs theory claiming there was a link between frustration and human needs for identity, security, recognition, autonomy, dignity and bonding.

Scimecca (1993) criticized Burton's theory for its failure to take culture and social institutions into consideration. Furthermore he said Burton's theory failed to explain where the human needs come from, which needs were more important and why. While Burton subsequently altered his position from one saying the needs were genetically based to one saying they were due to a combination of genetics and culture, Scimecca still described Burton's theory as quite flawed. This was mainly because Burton saw power as irrelevant and

claimed it had no role in problem solving or conflict resolution processes. This view was naive according to Scimecca (1993).

The underlying reason for trying to find a political theory of conflict was a concern that conflict resolution would become a tool for social control if it did not have a theoretical base underpinning it (Scimecca, 1993). He hoped that Weber's theories of power would provide the seeds that would lead to such a theory emerging. Burton (1990) reflected on this by stating that the legal system has now drifted out of the influence of the powerful in society. However he claims alternative dispute resolution offers opportunities for the powerful to again manipulate the outcomes of disputes to their advantage and warns that this needs to be watched out for.

### **Psychological theories of conflict**

Apart from the political theories of conflict a number of psychological theories have also emerged. These include intrapersonal theories such as psychodynamic theory, attribution theory and uncertainty theory as well as relationship theories such as social exchange theory, systems theory and game theory.

Psychodynamic theory attempts to explain conflicts that are misplaced or displaced and may arise out of nowhere (Lulofs & Cahn, 2000). It is based on the work of Sigmund Freud who claims that internal conflict between the id and the superego can produce frustration which results in displaced conflicts. These are conflicts where the frustration is taken out on someone different to the one that caused it (Cahn & Abigail, 2007).

Attribution theory tries to explain unreal conflicts. Sillars, Colletti, Parry and Rogers (1982) say people behave in conflict situations due to motives and ideas that they attribute to the other party that may not be accurate. Attribution theory helps explain retaliatory behaviour as it provides an explanation of why parties escalate unreal conflicts that can be applied to real conflicts as well.

Social exchange theory was developed by Kelley and Thibault (1978). They claim that parties in a relationship assess their relationship in terms of what they are putting into the relationship and what they are receiving. This theory says conflict arises when one party feels

that they are not getting as much back as they are putting in. Social Exchange theory assumes people behave rationally out of self interest. This is highly simplistic as research shows that people do not always behave rationally. For example the entire area of behavioural economics depends on people not behaving rationally. The New Economics Foundation report on behavioural economics (2005) says behavioural economics dispels the assumptions of neoclassical economists, that people make rational decisions in their own interests, to reveal how humans really are.

These three theories explain why some conflicts occur and are useful in the respect that they provide a framework for understanding these types of conflicts. However they do not explain why people sometimes act collaboratively in conflict situations and so have an underlying assumption that all conflict is destructive. They also do not address the role of power in conflict. This means they are useful for explaining conflict dynamics such as retaliatory behaviour and unreal conflicts, but do not offer a comprehensive explanation of conflict. However there are other psychological theories that have broader application to conflict resolution.

Uncertainty theory argues that conflict creates uncertainty in the relationship in which it occurs. Conflicts are also messy episodes where there may be uncertainty as to how the conflict should be perceived and what the facts were. Thus reducing uncertainty can be an important tool in dealing with conflict (Cahn & Abigail, 2007). This theory is useful as it identifies the role of uncertainty in conflict and should be a part of every conflict professional's check list (Cahn & Abigail, 2007).

Game theory is explained by Lulofs and Cahn (2000, p.132) as:

Games are conflict situations in which people must make choices while the other person is also making choices and in which both parties know that the combination of choices will determine the outcome.

Axelrod (1984) says game theory provides an explanation of why people might behave collaboratively in conflict situations. This is because it shows that if a situation occurs once then parties are likely to forego the benefits of cooperation for personal gain. However if the situation re-occurs indefinitely then the parties are likely to put the benefits of cooperation ahead of the benefits of personal gain. While it provides a rare theoretical framework for

understanding collaborative behaviour in conflict, game theory has three major flaws (Scimecca, 1993). First is the assumption of perfect information, that everyone understands everyone else's possible actions perfectly. While it is debatable if conditions of perfect information ever exist it is clear that if they do it is only in rare cases (Scimecca, 1993). Secondly it assumes that players eventually end up collaborating toward a rational and mutually beneficial goal and this may not necessarily be the case. Thirdly game theory takes no account of the role of power in conflict (Scimecca, 1993).

Systems theory emerged from discontent with the idea that conflict was a negative occurrence (Ruben, 1978). Ruben (1978) explains that conflict is a normal feature of any system and contends that human relationships should be thought of as systems. Conflict is the means by which systems adapt and grow and without conflict systems would stagnate and decay (Ruben, 1978). The word 'system' in the context of systems theory is defined by Cahn and Abigail (2007, p.147) as "a set of interrelated components acting together as a unit". Features of systems are that they are goal directed and that the unit, which may be as small as a marital unit, is the key focus instead of the individual. Cahn and Abigail (2007) assert that conflict occurs, from a systems theory perspective, because people within systems struggle to adapt both to the demands of the others within the unit and those of the environment. They say this is a healthy process and warn that without conflict there would be stagnation and decay. From a workplace conflict perspective systems theory has special significance. This is because organisations are clearly systems and so systems theory is a particularly relevant theory to consider when looking at workplace conflict.

Systems theory appears to have gained significant support amongst social scientists as it challenges the idea that conflict is necessarily a negative event, something that the other theories of conflict fail to do. Examples of social scientists who argue that conflict should not be viewed negatively include Tillett and French (2006), Tillett (1999), Lulofs and Cahn (2000), Ellis and Anderson (2005), Stitt (1998), Lipsky, Seeber and Fincher (2003), Eunson (2007) and Cahn and Abigail (2007). In the respect that systems theory looks at conflict as a normal rather than negative occurrence, systems theory has made a significant contribution to conflict resolution.

## **Concluding comments**

The area of modern conflict resolution has theoretical roots tracing back to key political theorists. These theorists looked at conflict as the major driver of systemic change in society. This created an environment where social scientists looking into conflict would understandably feel that conflict needed to be defined in a way that was relatively consistent with Marx and Weber.

In addition to political theories of conflict there are also a range of psychological theories of conflict. Of these the most significant with respect to workplace conflict is systems theory. This is because organisations are systems. Systems theory identifies looks at conflict as a normal and essential aspect of every system and so normalises conflict.

## **Section 2.4: Workplace Conflict**

### **History of workplace conflict**

According to Jaffee (2008) organisational conflict has its origins in the industrial revolution, where workers, concerned about their loss of freedom and autonomy, began to resist and rebel against capitalist employers. Conflict stemmed not just from the reorganisation of work life but from the hierarchical management structure that most organisations adopted. This was based on command and control (Jaffee, 2008). The control based culture that emerged was in recognition that hierarchy and wages alone could not ensure employees complied with organisational guidelines. Edwards (1979) identified three main forms of control organizations use to ensure employees comply with guidelines. Firstly there is technical control, where technologies such as assembly lines regulate the pace of work. Secondly direct control which involves bosses exercising control over subordinates. Finally bureaucratic control regulates workers through the formal structures of the organisation. Jaffee (2008) claims these efforts to closely control employees led to scientific management, an approach that reduces an employee to a unit of production and tends to eliminate the rights and welfare of employees. Employees rebelled against scientific management through resigning, collective resistance, sabotage and absenteeism (Jaffee, 2008).



The next major development in the history of the study of organizational conflict was the Hawthorne experiments (Jaffee, 2008). These were experiments where researchers tried to gauge the effect of changes in physical environment on productivity. The results were confusing as they showed productivity rising regardless of physical changes in work environments. Jaffee (2008) contends this was eventually attributed to team development and led to recognition that harmonious work environments were desirable. This ushered in the human relations era (Jaffee, 2008). However Jaffee (2008) claims even the human relations era failed to address the underlying tensions involved in having a top-down bureaucratic structure and this has led to bureaucratic structures now being “viewed as antithetical to productive and efficient organisational process” (Jaffee, 2008 p.69). Bowles and Gintis (1990) describe the major problem of a bureaucratic structure as being that employees assume the control mechanisms within it represent a major lack of trust by employers. This tends to create hostility and resentment towards management and to be bad for worker morale. Bowles and Gintis (1990) add that when the costs of implementing a controlling bureaucratic structure are added to the costs of the low morale that results from it, the gains from enhanced detection of shirking may not offset the costs of regulation. This means both the operational and the financial logic behind bureaucratic structures are now being challenged.

### **The postbureaucratic paradigm**

Jaffee (2008) claims that postbureaucracy is now a clear trend both in actual organisations and in organisational study. While bureaucracy is based on formalization, rational legal authority and instrumentalism, postbureaucracy is based on persuasion, dialogue and trust (Heckscher, 1994). Jaffee (2008) identifies actions guided by professional principles instead of by formal job definitions, information sharing and decision making driven by problems rather than top down orders as characteristics of the postbureaucratic paradigm.

### **Sources of workplace conflict**

There are a range of opinions from theorists about what the core sources of workplace conflict are. Jaffee (2008) traces the sources of workplace conflict back to two areas. Firstly

Jaffee (2008) says it stems from individual tensions. These arise when unique individuals with different goals and objectives have to work in an organisation with a single goal and objective. There is a natural tension in this relationship (Jaffee, 2008). A second source of conflict in organisations is the division of labour (Jaffee, 2008). This is because in almost all organisations workers are assigned specific jobs in specific departments and this approach tends to undermine unity and stimulate conflict (Jaffee, 2008). He adds that there are two clear divisions of labour in organisations, vertical and horizontal and that both of these can produce conflict.

Masters and Albright (2002) take a broader view of the sources of workplace conflict than Jaffee (2008). They assert that what makes the workplace such a 'ripe breeding ground' for conflict is that there are more sources of conflict in the workplace than in most other areas of our lives. They explain that in the workplace people are exposed to potential conflicts from environmental, workplace and organisational sources as well as the individual sources of conflict that are predominant in most other aspects of their lives. Even this position may be too narrow as Masters and Albright fail to mention the underlying power dynamics described earlier, in the commentary on power.

De Dreu and Gelfand (2008) identify three broad sources of conflict between individuals in organisations. These are firstly scarce resources and conflicts of interest which give rise to resource conflicts. Secondly a search for maintaining and promoting a positive view of the self which gives rise to identity and value conflicts. Thirdly a desire to hold consensually shared and socially validated opinions and beliefs which give rise to socio-cognitive conflicts of understanding.

### **Resource conflicts**

De Dreu and Gelfand (2008) claim that since resources within organisations are finite, there is ongoing competition for them. This results in conflict at all three major levels in organisations, the individual level, group level and organisational level. De Dreu and Gelfand (2008) assert that to understand resource conflicts it is useful to understand interdependence theory, a theory that assumes that participants within any social system depend on each other to attain positive outcomes and avoid negative outcomes. This creates a continual conflict of

interest situation as people continually struggle with deciding whether it is better to act selfishly for individual benefit or to cooperate and achieve a superior collective benefit.

For example, in an organisation an individual who is individually rational will 'defect' (De Dreu & Gelfand, 2008). This means they will show up late, work slowly, might steal and will not contribute. An individual who is collectively rational will work hard and help out. The risk with individual rationality is that if it becomes too widespread the company fails and then everyone in the organisation is worse off. This means that a continual conflict of interest situation exists between collectively rational and individually rational employees (De Dreu & Gelfand, 2008). This applies at all levels of organisations. De Dreu and Gelfand (2008) claim that being selfish is an example of individual rationality while being cooperative is an example of collective rationality. As individual rationality is collective irrationality and vice versa there is a dilemma with interdependence theory as participants must decide whether to be individually or collectively rational (De Dreu & Gelfand, 2008).

### **Identity conflicts**

According to Sedikides and Strube (1997) the self is the entirety of distinct yet interrelated psychological phenomena that are associated with reflective consciousness. They claim people generally strive for a positive self view and try to convince both themselves and others that they are worthwhile individuals through self-enhancement strategies. The result of this approach is an inflated view of the self. Sedikides and Strube (1997) say the level of success people enjoy with their self enhancement determines their level of self esteem. De Dreu and Gelfand (2008) assert that recent research has identified that the less stable the self view is with people the less able they are to deal with criticism and negativity. De Dreu and Gelfand (2008) say this means people with an unstable self view are more likely to escalate conflict than those with a stable self view. In addition to this De Dreu and Gelfand (2008) explain efforts at maintaining a positive self view inevitably create situations where people either intentionally or inadvertently hurt the self view of others. Furthermore De Dreu and Gelfand (2008) contend that people take their inflated self views into conflicts and this leads them to believe they are more cooperative than they really are and that their counterparty is more hostile. All of these factors are sources of identity conflicts based on a threatened self (De Dreu & Gelfand, 2008).

## **Sociocognitive conflicts**

According to De Dreu & Gelfand (2008) sociocognitive conflict theory has three basic assumptions. These are firstly that people try to have accurate perceptions of themselves. Secondly people have limited ability to be rational as they are restricted in the amount of information they have available. This leads them to develop different understandings and beliefs about identical objects of perception. Finally people seek social validation of their beliefs and this is a source of conflict if others do not share these beliefs (De Dreu & Gelfand, 2008). Socio cognitive theory is not consistent with the research regarding identity conflicts described in the previous paragraph which contradicts the first of these assumptions.

De Dreu and Gelfand (2008) stress that it would be a mistake to think that workplace conflict only has one of these three sources although mostly it has. They claim that “more often than not, workplace conflicts are about a mixture of opposing interests clashing values and incompatible beliefs” (De Dreu & Gelfand, 2008 p.22). Quantitative research suggests they are accurate in making this claim. The CPP Global Human Capital Report (2008) identifies the most common types of workplace conflict as personality clashes and warring egos. These findings are discussed later in this section.

## **Worker Dignity**

Hodson (2001) approaches workplace conflict from a different perspective. He identifies dignity as a critical component of workplace conflict. Hodson (2001) claims workers all struggle to achieve dignity and gain meaning and self realization from their jobs. Hodson (2001) identified four conditions in workplaces that can create conflict. ‘Mismanagement’ refers to a state where irresponsible, incompetent and poorly trained managers create a disorganized work environment. ‘Abuse’ is defined by Hodson (2001) as the arbitrary, inconsistent and inappropriate use of power over employees. ‘Overwork’ is a concept that Marx identified as a way in which workers are exploited. ‘Challenges to autonomy’ refers to situations where skilled workers have their decision making power taken from them Hodson (2001) says efforts to recover this power are a common response. The final condition he identified is ‘contradictions of employee involvement’. This classically applies in situations where there are non-bureaucratic team based structures in operation. In such situations if

there is an inconsistency between the true intentions of management and their rhetoric of worker participation, employees will tend to use strategies to bridge the gap.

Hodson (2001) also looked at how workers responded to factors that create conflict. He argues that the key motivator involved is a desire to maintain dignity. The main way workers respond to losing dignity is through resistance, a term Hodson (1995) says can include both passive and active forms. Examples of active resistance include sabotage, strikes, walkouts and confrontations (Hodson, 1995). Passive resistance measures include not cooperating and withholding effort and commitment.

### **Summary of theoretical approaches to workplace conflict**

The wide variety of views as to the sources of workplace conflict are symptomatic of an area in which only a limited amount of research has occurred and this is the case. Theoretical approaches to workplace conflict is an area that needs more research in order for a consensus to emerge. Jaffee (2008) and De Dreu and Gelfand (2008) both omitted to mention power as a key source of workplace conflict. As Kolb (2008) identifies, a tendency for organisations to individualise disputes as a way of protecting existing power structures makes it clear that researchers should be very aware of the influence of power in workplace conflict. To fail to mention power is therefore a weakness with their arguments.

Hodson (2001) was the only researcher who considered power a key source of workplace conflict. From the perspective of dualism and power Hodson's (2001) analysis is significantly better than the others. It is also supported by a significant amount of research. However there is a flaw with his approach that becomes apparent when it is considered from the perspective of dualism. This is that for staff to maintain dignity requires that their employers treat them with consideration and respect. This involves employers to some degree acting unselfishly and this describes non-dualistic behaviour. In this respect worker dignity can be seen as a symptom of nondualistic management behaviours. Thus Hodson (2001) focuses on a symptom of the solution rather than the cause.

A second problematic aspect of Hodson's research is his focus on worker dignity rather than the closely related and perhaps more appropriate concept of respect. Dignity is a concept that is very closely related to respect. While it is possible to feel respect for someone and to feel

respected by someone the idea of feeling dignified is more challenging. There seems to be in dignity an element that outward appearance can give dignity but with respect this element is not present as it must be felt. This argument implies Hodson should have chosen respect instead of worker dignity to describe his position.

What is clear is that there are many different sources of conflict in the workplace. Jaffee (2008) sums up this situation by asserting that conflict is a permanent feature of all organisational systems. This view is consistent with systems theory, which, as has previously been explained, theorises that this is the case.

### **Quantitative research on workplace conflict**

According to Spector and Bruk-Lee (2008) there are two major streams of research on workplace conflict, one which focuses on styles of conflict management and another that focuses on measuring the amount and costs of workplace conflict. Having devoted the first two parts of this section to the former the latter part will now be considered.

In 2008 CPP orchestrated a major quantitative research project into workplace conflict. In conjunction with two partner organisations they questioned 5,000 full time employees in nine countries in Europe and the Americas. The CPP Global Human Capital Report (2008) results showed every employee sampled in these nine countries claims to spend on average 2.1 hours each week dealing with conflict. Whilst the value of this time was not calculated for every country it was calculated in the US. The CPP Global Human Capital Report (2008) found that in the US the annual cost of conflict, in terms of worker time lost, was US\$359 billion. Hahn (2000) provides a perspective that illuminates this finding on the level of interpersonal conflict occurring in workplaces. Hahn (2000) asked participants, who were representative of a full-time working sample in a variety of occupations to use their diaries to describe and record the numbers of conflicts they experienced at work. Results showed participants reported experiencing interpersonal conflicts on 50% of the days they went to work.

Personality clashes and warring egos were the most common types of conflict in the workplace according to the CPP Global Human Capital Report (2008). They were identified as the primary cause of conflict by 49% of participants. The second most common cause of

conflict was stress, which was identified by 34% of participants as the primary cause of conflict.

The CPP Global Human Capital Report (2008) identified that 10 percent of participants said they spent six hours or more a week involved in destructive conflict. According to CPP this pattern reflected how some organisations were worse than others at managing conflict. The 10 percent of participants who reported experiencing six hours or more of destructive conflict each week experienced at least three times the average amount of destructive conflict. CPP commented that for the organisations in this 10 percent conflict was a serious problem.

Harris and Crothers (2010) recently completed quantitative research in this area in New Zealand. Their findings indicated that while average amounts of time lost to destructive conflict in New Zealand were broadly in line with the CPP figures, the CPP Global Human Capital Report (2008) may have only identified part of the cost of time lost to destructive workplace conflict. Applying the Masters and Albright (2002) definition of conflict as occurring whenever disagreement is felt by one of the parties, Harris and Crothers (2010) measured not only the amount of time spent in manifest conflict but the amount spent in latent conflict as well. Results showed comparable time was spent in latent conflict to that spent in manifest conflict. This research can be found in appendix 2 of this thesis. While their sample size was small at 70 their results indicate that the 2008 cost of workplace conflict in the USA, calculated by CPP on the basis of time spent in conflict, may only represent half the actual cost of time lost to conflict in workplaces in the US.

It is important to appreciate that time spent in conflicts represents only part of the cost of workplace conflict. McCrindle (2004) argues that there are both measurable and immeasurable costs that should be considered. Measurable costs include recruitment costs, staff turnover and training costs, absentee costs, productivity costs and legal costs. Immeasurable costs include lost motivation, damage to the relationship between employers and employees and damage to the relationship between a company and its customers. McCrindle (2004) furthermore points out that the costs of destructive workplace conflict are not limited to the actual sums spent in handling it and do not stop once the conflict is over. Taking the CPP Global Human Capital Report (2008) figures and the commentary by McCrindle together identifies destructive workplace conflict as being one of the biggest

expenses that workplaces face. It also indicates that the potential savings that organisations may achieve through better management of conflict justify ongoing investment in this area.

Spector and Bruk-Lee (2008) claim the impact of destructive workplace conflict goes even further than the areas identified by McCrindle (2004). It also has serious effects on employee health because of the stress it causes:

Conflict has also been shown to be associated with employee depression, negative emotional states, psychosomatic complaints, life dissatisfaction, burnout and psychiatric morbidity” (Spector & Bruk-Lee, 2008, p. 267).

Their comments show that in order to appreciate the full cost of destructive workplace conflict it is necessary to consider the health costs as well as the operational ones.

Spector and Bruk-Lee (2008) identify that interpersonal conflict is linked to numerous negative emotional states, including anxiety, anger, depression and frustration. Evidence supporting this position comes from Bolger, DeLongis, Kessler and Schilling (1989) who concluded that interpersonal conflict was the most important factor affecting psychological distress. Bolger et al. (1989) found interpersonal conflict accounted for more than 80% of the experience of the negative emotions anxiety, hostility and depression. They therefore identified interpersonal conflict as one of the key determinants of daily mood. In addition Spector and Bruk-Lee (2008) claim interpersonal conflict has been linked with somatic complaints. Symptoms include headaches and upset stomachs. Furthermore Spector and Bruk-Lee (2008) provide research showing that employees who report higher levels of interpersonal conflicts in the workplace also report lower levels of job satisfaction.

Spector and Bruk-Lee (2008) stress that what is important is not the specific emotional response to conflict but the overall experience of negativity. They cite research from Fox, Spector and Miles (2001) showing that there was such a strong positive correlation (+.49) between conflict and negative emotion that the variety of negative emotional states experienced at work as a result of conflict can be reliably studied by measuring overall negative emotions.

De Frank and Ivancevich (1998) have research demonstrating a strong positive correlation between workplace conflict and stress. Cooper and Payne (1988) found that up to 90% of



workplace healthcare visits are in some part due to stress. The Health Enhancement Research Organisation (2004) report found that male employees suffering persistent depression had health care costs nearly double those that did not report depression.

These health problems associated with workplace conflict are costing employers large amounts of money. De Frank and Ivancevich (1998) estimated that in 1998 the annual cost of work stress borne by organisations in the USA was over \$200 billion. This figure covers staff turnover, health care costs and productivity. However the health costs associated with workplace conflict and the time costs identified by the CPP Global Human Capital Report (2008) and Harris and Crothers (2010) represent only part of the cost of workplace conflict. Murphy (1993) estimates the annual costs of counterproductive work behaviour (CWB) in the USA in 1993 were also as much as \$200 billion. Spector and Bruk-Lee (2008) identify examples of CWB as turning up late, stealing, taking unauthorized breaks and using aggressive behaviours. Chen and Spector (1992) found strong positive correlations between destructive workplace conflict and CWB. Correlations they reported with interpersonal conflict at work included aggression (+.49), hostility (+.46) and sabotage (+.34).

As Masters and Albright (2002) assert that the levels and costs of destructive workplace conflict are growing this problem is getting worse rather than better. Organizations have finite resources and operate in a competitive market place and managing conflict well clearly offers significant competitive advantages to organisations. The inverse of this, managing conflict badly, is likely to threaten the survival of organisations. This means that market forces are increasing pressure on organisations to improve their handling of workplace conflict and in this respect have joined with science in the struggle against the dualistic thinking that leads to high levels of destructive workplace conflict.

Bentley et al. (2009) conducted recent quantitative research for the New Zealand Government on stress and bullying in New Zealand workplaces. They surveyed 25 workplaces in the health, education and hospitality sectors as well as a number of individuals in the travel industry. 1726 respondents completed their survey. Bentley et al. (2009) identified that actual levels of bullying were far higher than managers believed and that in addressing bullying it was particularly important that systemic factors were considered. These included leadership, HR practices, bullying reporting and work organisation. The report clearly identified the major role that systemic factors play in some workplace bullying in New Zealand.

## **Concluding comments**

The CPP Global Human Capital Report (2008) provides a valuable perspective on workplace conflict. This is because their study looked at what was actually happening in workplaces. This can be contrasted with the theorists discussed in this section who have views that do not appear to be supported by research, only by other theorists. The CPP Global Human Capital Report (2008) identifies that the bottom 10% of organisations experience levels of conflict on average three times higher than the average. This indicates problem levels of conflict are a multiple of normal levels. On this basis a sensible starting point in assessing when levels of destructive conflict become problematic is when they reach three times average levels and CPP commented that conflict in the bottom 10% of organisations was a serious problem.

The research identified in this section showed that financially the problem of excessive levels of destructive conflict is so large that organisations that manage conflict badly face conflict costs of many thousands of dollars per employee per year. It is still not possible to precisely calculate the costs of destructive workplace conflict in America. However from the limited research identified in this literature review the final figure is likely to be more than a trillion dollars each year. This is because the figures in this literature review identify approximately \$1 trillion dollars a year in workplace conflict expenses in the US. When the trillion dollars is divided by US Government figures showing the US Labour force fluctuates around 145 million the result is a cost of conflict of \$6,900 per employee each year. However as the bottom 10% of organisations experience average costs of conflict three times normal it means the annual costs of workplace conflict in the bottom 10% are more than \$20,000 per employee. As Harris and Crothers (2010) identified levels of workplace conflict in New Zealand similar to those in the US it can be concluded that the costs of workplace conflict per employee are also likely to be similar in New Zealand to the costs in America.

That excessive levels of destructive workplace conflict only occur in some organisations is also important. This is because this variation indicates that the cause of excessive levels of conflict is related to internal systemic factors such as management and management practices. If levels of conflict were the same across organisations it would indicate that external systemic factors or interpersonal factors were the cause of excessive levels of conflict. Bentley et al. (2009) reported that systemic factors played a key role in workplace bullying in New Zealand. Their research clearly identified the critical role systemic factors

played in bullying in New Zealand workplaces. Thus there is both implicit and explicit quantitative research evidence as to the importance of systemic factors in workplace conflict.

Having looked at the costs of workplace conflict it is now appropriate to consider the issue of conflict more closely. The next section looks at how conflict can be both constructive and destructive and considers strategies for dealing with conflict.

## **Section 2.5: Conflict Strategies and patterns**

### **Conflict Strategies**

One of the rare areas of broad consensus within conflict resolution studies is that there are five conflict strategies that can be used to manage conflict. The original source identifying these five conflict strategies was Thomas and Kilmann (1974) who provide a useful basis for reviewing the strategies as they developed them out of a belief that conflict should be looked at two dimensionally. These dimensions are assertiveness and cooperativeness. Thomas and Kilmann (1974) believe that everyone demonstrates aspects of both of these dimensions. However Lulofs and Cahn (2000) take a different perspective, claiming people generally only fit one strategy.

The five conflict strategies are mentioned by researchers including Wertheim et al. (1998); Cahn and Abigail (2007); Lulofs and Cahn (2000); Scott (1990); Masters and Albright (2002) and Wilmot and Hocker (2007). The following chart (Cahn & Abigail, 2007, p.81) shows these strategies, what they mean, what their objective is and the behaviours they result in:

<b><u>Conflict Strategy</u></b>	<b><u>Definition</u></b>	<b><u>Objective</u></b>	<b><u>Behaviour/Tactic</u></b>
<b>Avoidance</b>	<b>withdrawal</b>	<b>lose-lose</b>	<b>physically absent or silent</b>
<b>Accommodation</b>	<b>acquiescence</b>	<b>lose-win</b>	<b>give in; don't make waves</b>
<b>Competition</b>	<b>aggression</b>	<b>win-lose</b>	<b>selfish, argumentative</b>
<b>Compromise</b>	<b>trade-offs</b>	<b>win and lose</b>	<b>wheeler-dealer</b>
<b>Collaboration</b>	<b>mutual satisfaction</b>	<b>win-win</b>	<b>supportive of self and other</b>

**Avoidance:** Avoidance is a strategy usually adopted by people with a poor history of dealing with conflict (Cahn & Abigail, 2007). Wertheim et al. (1998) say avoidance is a destructive conflict strategy and that using it means conflicts never get resolved. Furthermore often the other party turns to fighting in order to get a response. Thomas and Kilmann (1974) say avoiders score low on both assertiveness and cooperativeness.

**Accommodation:** Accommodators are people who give in to maintain the illusion of harmony (Cahn & Abigail, 2007). Thomas and Kilmann (1974) say accommodation scores low on assertiveness and high on cooperativeness. Wertheim et al. (1998) view accommodation as a destructive strategy because it often leads to a build up of negative emotions. Resentment can develop for the accommodator and guilt or contempt for the victor.

**Competition:** Competitive individuals are high on assertiveness and low on cooperativeness (Thomas & Kilmann, 1974). Wertheim et al. (1998) see competition as a destructive conflict strategy. This is because it is a classic win-lose outcome that leaves the loser unhappy with the outcome and reinforces the competitive behaviour of the winner. This is also the conflict strategy that most reflects dualistic thinking.

**Compromise:** Compromise means neither party get what they want from a conflict. While Wertheim et al. (1998) view compromise as a constructive conflict strategy other researchers disagree. Thomas and Kilmann (1974) say the dangers with compromise are that it leads those that do it to sometimes lose sight of key issues and that there is an overemphasis on bargaining and tradeoffs, that tends to take attention away from the merits of the parties positions. Cahn and Abigail (2007) say compromise delivers half win- half win outcomes. For these reasons while compromise is better than the destructive strategies it is not comparable to collaboration.

**Collaboration:** Collaboration is the best conflict strategy according to Lulofs and Cahn (2000). This is because it delivers win-win outcomes. Thomas and Kilmann (1974) say collaborators are high in assertiveness and high in accommodation. Collaboration uses “integrative behaviours and developing mutually satisfying agreements to solve the problem” (Cahn & Abigail, 2007, p. 82). Cahn and Abigail (2007) view integrative behaviours as being aspects of teamwork such as mutual assistance, cooperation and collective action. Collaboration is non-dualistic behaviour as it requires the parties to think of the best interests of both sides rather than just their own interests.

There is broad consensus amongst researchers that collaboration is the best conflict strategy as it offers an approach that can achieve the win-win outcomes required for conflict to be resolved (Lulofs & Cahn, 2000; Wilmot & Hocker, 2007; Cahn & Abigail, 2007; Wertheim et al. 1998). However there are a range of different names and approaches used by researchers to describe collaboration. For example Wilmot and Hocker (2007) approach this issue from the perspective of avoiding destructive conflict and Wertheim et al. (1998) call collaboration cooperative problem solving.

Cahn and Abigail (2007) prefer not to describe a process, instead focusing on the principles that the parties need to apply for a collaborative solution to occur. They define these as, “separating people from the problem, focusing on interests, brainstorming options and finding objective criteria on which to base decisions” (Cahn & Abigail, 2007, p. 127). They posit that parties need to demonstrate collaborative behaviours to achieve win-win outcomes. These behaviours include looking for the areas they have in common, talking cooperatively and using *we* statements rather than *I* statements. Cahn and Abigail (2007) claim it is also important that the parties communicate frequently and consult each other often to check assumptions. Furthermore they point out the importance of parties staying positive, suggest parties have a prepared best alternative in case they do not get what they want and advocate that parties also engage in fractionation of the problem. This is a process where the problem is broken down into small pieces and each is dealt with one at a time.

Tillett and French (2005) and Masters and Albright (2002) both advocate nine step processes to achieve a collaborative outcome. Both are similar and involve the parties agreeing on the problem, evaluating options together and then agreeing on a mutually satisfying solution. These processes are heavily dependent on the parties having both the right attitudes and skills to resolve conflict collaboratively and to this end both processes assume the involvement of a skilled third party conflict manager.

Having a third party manage the conflict to achieve a collaborative outcome has a number of weaknesses. Firstly it means that conflicts must have escalated to the point where a third party is identified as necessary before they begin to be dealt with. Using a third party also means the skills for resolving conflicts are not given to the staff, who are the people who are experiencing the conflicts. This means that to some extent this approach is a bandage that treats symptoms of workplace conflict rather than the causes. As destructive conflict is a

massive problem for some organisations, the idea of addressing this problem in a way that addresses only its symptoms appears somewhat flawed. However it is also clear from the discussion earlier in this thesis that with some conflicts the parties need third party help to resolve them and so a dialectic process exists around this issue.

In contrast, the Cahn and Abigail (2007) approach assumes that staff within organisations actually develop the skills to resolve conflict collaboratively, meaning their approach addresses the problems of workplace conflict directly. This seems more likely to lead to success. This is because the tools for resolving conflicts are given to staff through this approach, meaning the solution is supplied to the source of the problem. Furthermore this approach enables conflicts to be dealt with early in their lifecycle, before they have escalated to the point where outsiders are called in to help. It seems reasonable to assume that once conflict has escalated and positions are entrenched it is more difficult to resolve conflicts collaboratively. Thus the earlier conflict can be addressed the better. For these reasons the Cahn and Abigail (2007) commentary appears to be the most useful.

The problems with the Cahn and Abigail (2007) approach are that staff would obviously require significant training to be able to demonstrate the types of behaviours they refer to. Secondly as there are conflicts that the parties cannot resolve by themselves, defined by Cahn and Abigail themselves as disputes, the Cahn and Abigail (2007) approach will only work in a limited number of situations.

However potentially the biggest problem with collaborative conflict resolution processes emerged when researchers, attempting to understand situations where collaboration leads to mutual benefits while the parties act with independent interests, studied game theory (Witkin, 2008). Game theory shows that if they understand a situation occurs only once then the parties will forego the benefits of cooperation for personal gain, however if the situation is repeated indefinitely then the parties will be more likely to value the benefits of cooperation ahead of personal gain (Axelrod, 1984). Witkin (2008) claims game theory has a conflict resolution model known as the negotiators dilemma, which has been described earlier in this literature review. To recap, the negotiators dilemma is that when involved in a collaborative conflict resolution process the parties will be aware that if they act competitively while the other side acts collaboratively they will be advantaged (Axelrod, 1984). Thus it is safe to act competitively in a collaborative process and risky to act collaboratively. Collaborative

conflict resolution appears to be a good theory that may not actually be able to be consistently put into practice because of the negotiators dilemma.

### **Patterns of conflict**

Lulofs and Cahn (2000) contend that conflicts often follow a pattern in the way they progress. This means the phases of conflict are reasonably predictable. Furthermore they claim that there are common processes that occur in most conflicts. Lulofs and Cahn (2000) believe that it is as important to understand these phases and processes as it is to understand the various conflict strategies. Cahn and Abigail (2007) differentiate patterns of constructive conflict from patterns of destructive conflict.

### **Patterns of constructive conflict**

Cahn and Abigail (2007) claim constructive conflict has a five stage pattern. These phases are:

- 1- The 'prelude to conflict' refers to the four variables that combine to make it possible for conflict to occur. These are the participants, the relationship between them, other interested parties and the social and physical environment that the conflict occurs in.
- 2- The 'triggering event' is the earliest act that started the conflict as perceived by at least one of the parties involved.
- 3- The 'initiation phase' means the point where both parties realize there is a conflict.
- 4- The 'differentiation phase' refers to the time when the parties interact about the conflict. Cahn and Abigail (2007) assert it involves the participants using both constructive and destructive strategies and both sides revealing how they see the issues and what outcomes they would like.
- 5- The 'resolution phase' is when both sides agree to an outcome which may fully or partly resolve the conflict.

Folger et al. (2005) also describe patterns of constructive conflict. However their model has only two phases and these are differentiation and integration and closely resemble the final two phases in the Cahn and Abigail (2007) model.

### **Patterns of destructive conflict.**

Wertheim et al. (1998) describe destructive conflict strategies as those that cause the conflicts to escalate. They contend that the forces that cause escalation are circular as the outcome of one conflict determines the scene for the next.

Cahn and Abigail (2007) describe a number of conflict strategies that are destructive and cause conflict to escalate. Firstly the conflict avoidance cycle is typical with people who try to avoid initiating conflict or try to withdraw when conflicts arise. This pattern is symptomatic of people who believe conflict is negative and abnormal. This pattern is associated with three misassumptions that they identify. These are that conflict is a symptom that the system is operating incorrectly, that conflicts and disagreements are the same and that initiating and escalating conflict is bad.

Cahn and Abigail (2007) describe the chilling effect is a pattern where one person withholds grievances from another, usually due to fear of their reaction. This focuses on the negative aspects of the other and these become perceived areas of incompatibility and lead to ongoing conflicts. This approach generally leads to less communication in relationships and can lead to people cycling out of the relationship altogether.

Finally there is the competitive conflict escalation cycle which Lulofs and Cahn (2000) view as the most common of the three. The characteristics of this pattern are that people go over the same issues repeatedly, bring up past grievances and add them to present ones and do not tend to find workable solutions. A key ingredient of this pattern is that it escalates conflict. "Competition, biased perceptions and commitment to one's original position may all push a conflict into an escalating cycle" (Lulofs & Cahn, 2000, p. 81).

Wertheim et al. (1998) explain that a key influence on whether a conflict is resolved or escalates is the mindset of the participants. A win-win mind-set generally leads to the conflict being resolved however a win-lose mind-set generally leads to the conflict escalating. The problem is that most people go into conflicts expecting a win-lose outcome (Thompson, 1990). According to Wertheim et al. (1998) this means the parties are likely to compete and look at each other as opponents and this means the parties are likely to take positions and defend them even in preference to an advocated solution. They claim that in a win-lose situation most people adopt the aggressor – defender model and assume that they are the



defenders. However what is really occurring is the defensive spiral. This is a type of matching where one side matches the others actions, thus if one side is competitive the other will be competitive as well and this can cause the conflict to escalate. Wertheim et al. (1998) posit that when a conflict is won by win-lose strategies both sides have further reason to fight, the victor because their fighting has been shown to work and the loser due to resentment and this leads to escalation.

A final factor Wertheim et al. (1989) consider as destructive is when the parties become entrapped. They gave the analogy of gamblers who keep gambling as they have lost too much to stop to describe the entrapment of people who have been involved in conflicts for lengthy periods in the process.

### **Conflict escalation**

Pruitt (2008) approaches destructive conflict from a slightly different perspective. He stresses that both conflict and conflict escalation are normal parts of organisational life. Mild escalation can actually be beneficial as it identifies issues and motivates the parties involved to resolve them (Pruitt, 2008). What is a problem is severe escalation as it can disrupt an organisation from functioning and become self fuelling. According to Pruitt (2008) conflict escalation occurs when a party to a conflict uses heavier contentious tactics than have been used previously and this almost always occurs through retaliation. Pruitt (2008) uses retaliation and escalation interchangeably. Accordingly throughout the rest of this section the two terms should be considered as meaning the same thing.

There are numerous forms of conflict escalation and for this reason it is useful to categorize different types. Neuman and Baron (1997) say there are eight types of workplace conflict escalation and these are shown in the following chart, together with examples of actions that fit in each category. This provides an insight into what is meant by conflict escalation behaviours.

<b>Physical active direct escalation:</b>  - using violence against strikers  - assault.	<b>Physical passive direct escalation:</b>  - going on strike  - chronic lateness	<b>Physical active indirect escalation:</b>  - theft  - sabotage  - hiding needed resources	<b>Physical passive indirect escalation:</b>  - failing to protect the other party's welfare  - going slow so that targets are missed
<b>Verbal active direct escalation:</b>  - yelling  - threatening  - using a derogatory tone of voice  - being insulting.	<b>Verbal passive direct escalation:</b>  - failing to return phone calls  - refusing the other party's requests  - giving the silent treatment	<b>Verbal active indirect escalation:</b>  - filing a grievance  - whistle blowing  - spreading rumours	<b>Verbal passive indirect escalation:</b>  - failing to send information  - failing to warn of coming problems.

Conflict escalation behaviours (Neuman & Baron, 1997, p.40).

According to Pruitt (2008) escalation can be either unilateral or bilateral. Bilateral sequences often develop into repeated cycles of retaliation and counter retaliation and this leads to the escalation becoming severe. Skarlicki and Folger (2004) contend retaliation can be motivated by either; anger, to deter an offender, to show an offender one is not weak, to create justice or to prop up social norms. Pruitt (2008) adds that often there is an element of settling a score involved.

Factors that make retaliation (escalation) more likely include when the offender is seen as responsible for the situation (Martinko & Zellars, 1998). Allred (1999) adds that it is more likely that there will be counter retaliation if the offender does not think they are responsible for the situation. This works both ways as Pruitt (2008) adds that attributing responsibility to an offender may involve the actor overlooking the fact that the offender may be retaliating for

something the actor did previously. Thus misunderstanding is often at the core of retaliatory action.

Retaliation is also more likely if the offender is perceived as having acted unfairly. Pruitt (2008) identifies three types of fairness norms that if violated can result in escalation. These are; distributive justice, where one's outcomes depend on one's effort; procedural justice, where there is a consistent and rational decision making process and interactional justice, where one's views are sought, one's outcomes are clearly explained and one is treated with respect.

Retaliation is also more likely where there is a cognitive deficit that inhibits the capacity of the actor to think ahead (Baron, 2004). Examples of factors that lead to cognitive deficits include stress, fatigue, pressure and heavy alcohol consumption (Pruitt, 2008). Other factors that Pruitt (2008) identifies that encourage retaliation are; anger from a prior unrelated situation, aggressive cues, and autonomic arousal such as happens when one is provoked when one has recently exercised.

While most escalation weakens with time there are some conflicts that do not and these are known as intractable conflicts (Coleman, 2000). These are due to a combination of conflict spirals and structural changes (Pruitt, 2008). Structural changes mean changes in the relationship between the parties that result from their ongoing retaliation and heavy escalation. These changes prevent a return to the former state of the relationship and perpetuate conflicts (Pruitt, 2008).

### **What to do when a conflict escalates**

According to Pruitt (2008) the best approach is to try to prevent conflicts from escalating. Pruitt (2008) advises trying to avoid situations that lead to conflict escalation when a conflict is developing. He advocates screening out aggressive people, keeping alcohol consumption low, trying to keep all parties positive and avoiding cognitive deficits. He also stresses that when action is taken it needs to be seen as fair, using consistent criteria and without bias. Those impacted by the actions should have the opportunity to speak out. The decision should also be explained in a way that is respectful and comprehensive. Conflict management

systems should also be utilized. One aspect that Pruitt (2008) identifies as critical with conflict management systems is timing and he advises third parties look for a ripe moment. This is one where the parties may be able to discuss differences directly or at least allow third parties to communicate with them.

According to Baron (1976) escalation can also be made less likely through humour or mildly erotic stimulation. Baron (1976) experimented with having a car remain stopped at traffic lights when they turned green. When a female assistant was present dressed in either a clown suit or minimal clothing the rate of horn honking by frustrated male drivers dropped by nearly half.

### **Concluding comments**

The previous section identified how organisational conflict was problematic when there were excessive levels of conflict occurring and that this happened in around 10% of organisations. This section has further differentiated the issue by distinguishing between constructive and destructive conflict. Thus the problem with workplace conflict has moved from it being a problem when excessive levels of conflict occur to it being a problem when excessive levels of destructive conflict occur.

While this section has explained the broad patterns that occur in both constructive and destructive conflicts it has not addressed the issue of what happens with conflict when there are diverse parties involved. The next section considers this issue and looks at gender, culture, organizational culture, personality and group dynamics to see what impact they have on levels of destructive conflict.

## **Section 2.6: Diversity and conflict: Gender, culture, personality, group dynamics and organisational culture.**

### **Gender**

Lulofs and Cahn (2000) claim the issue of gender and how it affects conflict stems from a tendency for people to use gender as an explanation for behaviour. According to Lulofs and Cahn (2000) some studies show there are differences between how men and women behave in conflict and others show there are no differences. Lulofs and Cahn (2000, p.50) say that irrespective of which side of this debate one takes “men and women have different expectations of male and female roles and the way those roles should be enacted”. Folger et al. (2005) say that gender differences in conflict are mostly due to cultural rather than biological factors. Robbins, Judge, Millett and Waters-Marsh (2008) claim that there are differences between men and women when it comes to emotional reactions and the ability to read others. They say there are three possible explanations for this. These are that firstly that men and women tend to be socialized differently, with women being socialized to be more nurturing. Secondly women may actually have more ability to read others and express their emotions and finally women may feel a greater need for social approval and so develop their abilities to demonstrate positive emotions.

Del Collins (2005) places the blame for perceiving gender differences at the feet of dualism, claiming gender segregation is a clear manifestation of dualistic thinking. She claims both Plato and Aristotle defined women as inferior to men and that this led to the emergence of ‘androcentrism’, a belief in male superiority. She contends that as society becomes more aware of the gender bias in language gender loaded words are being replaced by more androgynous ones and gives the shift from ‘air hostesses’ to ‘flight attendants’ as an example.

While there is ongoing debate about whether men and women have biologically different brains there is no debate that women are disadvantaged in the workplace relative to men. Proof of this is that the OECD (2010) published a chart showing that women in New Zealand were only paid 90% of what men were paid for doing the same job in 2006. What is clear from this discussion is that if there are differences between men and women they are relatively insignificant at worst. The longer the debate as to whether there are biological differences between the brains of men and women continues the longer society can put off addressing the inequalities that exist between men and women in the workplace.

An interesting perspective on the fact that women are clearly disadvantaged in the workplace comes from social dominance theory. Sidanius and Pratto (1999) explain this theory as being that oppression based on gender and culture can be considered part of the basic human tendency to form group based social hierarchies where a finite amount of resources are disproportionally held by those at the top of the hierarchies. These elite groups dominate those in the lower levels. This is consistent with Weber (1948) as it is clearly a power based theory of conflict that implies those with less power, such as women and racial minorities, will suffer at the hands of those that have more.

Another interesting perspective comes from Jehn, Bezrukova and Thatcher (2008) who found that workplace subgroups formed along the lines of social categories such as gender and culture lead to stereotyping and prejudice and in this respect encourage conflict. However workplace subgroups formed on the basis of work experience and qualifications encouraged cooperative group behaviour that allowed diverse perspectives to be integrated. Smith-Crowe, Brief and Umphress (2008) claim these findings explain inconsistencies in the literature and should alert researchers not to construe diversity assuming categories like race and sex are equivalent to characteristics such as work experience or functional background.

## **Culture**

Culture is one of the most difficult words to define in the English language (Avruch, 1998). Proof of this is that according to Avruch (1998) anthropologists had identified more than 150 definitions of culture prior to 1950. Avruch (1998) says culture is broadly used in three ways. Firstly culture refers to special intellectual or artistic works and when used in this respect is sometimes called high culture, a concept Avruch attributes to Arnold. Secondly culture refers to the position of a society on a scale that ranges from savagery via barbarism to civilisation. This definition was pioneered by Tylor (1870) and became one of the foundations of anthropology (Avruch, 1998). The final application of the word culture emerged in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and according to Avruch (1998) is attributed to Boas who attempted to create a scientific rather than aesthetic basis for culture. Boas dismissed the idea of there being a continuum of cultures and instead emphasized their uniqueness and variety.

Avruch (1998) claims Arnold's view of culture should be dismissed as it cannot be used as an analytical tool. To use culture as an analytical tool Avruch (1998) suggests a blend of both Tylor's and Boas' definitions. This blend results in a two tiered approach to culture that looks at both generic and local culture with generic culture looking at human nature and local culture at diversity and variation (Avruch, 1998).

Hofstede (1991) has a different perspective from Avruch and claims culture involves patterns of thinking. He emphasises that culture is always a collective phenomenon "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group..from another" (Hofstede, 1991, p.5).

### **Culture and conflict resolution**

In terms of culture and its relationship with conflict resolution Avruch (1998) makes two observations. The first is that conflict resolution at its core is about communication and communication involves recognising the "human element: subjectivity, cognition and context-culture" (Avruch, 1998, p.40). Secondly the issue of culture is a real one that many of the abstract conflict theorists, such as game theorists, usually ignore. This final comment is possibly in response to those social scientists who try to dismiss culture as peripheral to conflict resolution. For example Zartman (1993) justifies overlooking culture as an important aspect of conflict resolution by claiming it is too nebulous to be measured by univariate predictive models of behaviour. Secondly Zartman (1993) argues that since conflict resolution is practiced universally cultural differences are simply variations in style and language. Saying that as conflict resolution is practiced globally that cultural influences should not be viewed as important is a generalisation that would need to be backed with hard supporting evidence before it could be taken seriously.

Avruch (1998) mentions a criticism of culture that Zartman (1993) missed. This is the argument that irrespective of whatever type of culture is dealing with conflict, at the end of the day power is what is critical. Avruch (1998) acknowledges this is a rational argument however he points out that history has shown that power by itself is not enough to resolve conflicts. Thus he believes culture is an important consideration in conflict resolution.

Lulofs and Cahn (2000, p. 41) build on this by identifying intercultural conflict as a category and cite Ting-Toomey who defines intercultural conflict as “the perceived incompatibility of values, norms, processes or goals between a minimum of two cultural parties over identity, relational and/or substantive issues.” Folger et al. (2005) also view culture as an important influence on how people behave in conflict situations. They claim that our patterns of thinking and reasoning are learned from the culture we are socialised into.

Lulofs and Cahn (2000) say that while it is important to appreciate cultural impacts on conflict resolution, there is a risk in confusing people through doing so. They do not take a firm position on this issue and acknowledge that there is a lack of consensus as to exactly how best to deal with culture in conflict in an increasingly multicultural world. Folger et al. (2005) go further than Lulofs and Cahn (2000). They point out that processes of social categorization and group differentiation tend to cause people to take their general stereotypical beliefs about other groups into conflict situations and this can cause longer and more intense conflicts. Thus differences in culture can heighten divisions between groups (Folger et al. 2005).

De Dreu and Gelfand (2008) claim that it becomes clear that culture affects conflict behaviours when one compares individualistic and collectivist cultures. For example they assert that violations of rights are reacted to much more strongly in the USA (individualistic) than in Korea (collectivist).

De Dreu and Gelfand (2008) identify one unusual aspect of culture as they contend it may suppress the positive effects of conflict in collectivist cultures. This is because there is a pressure to conform in collectivist cultures that does not exist in individualistic ones and this means that the open debate that can lead to positive outcomes in individualistic cultures tends not to be helpful in collectivist ones. Nibler and Harris (2003) achieved results consistent with this theory as they found that while open debate about conflict benefitted American groups it did not benefit Chinese groups. Tinsley (2001) found that in general in individualistic cultures there is a preference for forcing conflict resolution styles and integrating interests. However with collectivist cultures the preference is for conflict strategies of avoidance and withdrawal.

Differences between collectivist and individualistic cultures may offer the clearest evidence of how cultural differences impact on conflict behaviours. James and Gillibrand (2005)



explain that in individualistic cultures positions on issues are usually transmitted clearly through language. However in collectivist cultures positions on issues are either internalized or transmitted through the physical context of interaction. James and Gillibrand (2005) state that with collectivist cultures facial expressions, tone of voice and gestures are as important as the meaning of the actual words used. In such cultures individuals will expect the other person to know what the problem is so they can avoid the embarrassment and loss of face that comes from talking directly about the issue.

However while researchers have identified how different cultures approach conflict differently there appears to be no evidence suggesting that some cultures experience significantly higher levels of destructive conflict than others. Evidence supporting this comes from The CPP Global Human Capital Report (2008), which looked at workplace conflict in nine different countries and was unable to identify a particular culture that experienced significantly more conflict than the others. However CPP were able to identify that factors attributed to being major causes of conflict did vary considerably according to culture. For example clash of values was identified as a major cause of conflict by 17% of participants from the US and UK compared with 30% from Brazil. Another example is that overall 8% of participants saw lack of clarity over accountability as a major cause of conflict while in Germany 33% saw it as a major cause of conflict.

## **Personality**

The CPP Global Human Capital Report (2008) claims that 49% of their 5000 participants spread across nine countries identified personality clashes and warring egos was the main cause of conflict in their workplaces. Harris and Crothers (2010) also reported that personality clashes were an important aspect of workplace conflict in New Zealand. 45% of participants in their survey mentioned they experienced personality clashes in their workplaces either daily or weekly. This means that personality is an important aspect of workplace conflict.

However despite its importance personality is not even mentioned in much of the theoretical conflict resolution scholarship reviewed. Brandon and Robertson (2007), Lulofs and Cahn (2000), Tillett and French (2005) and Cahn and Abigail (2007) do not address the issue of

personality with respect to interpersonal conflicts. As their books were about interpersonal conflict it is hard to understand how they could have completely overlooked personality differences as a source of conflict. This seems a very fundamental oversight.

### **What is personality?**

The Penguin Dictionary of Psychology (2001) describes two broad classes of definitions of personality. One of these looks at personality as being an entity with a causal role in behaviour and the other looks at personality as a secondary factor that is implied on the basis of consistency of behaviour. The Penguin Dictionary of Psychology (2001) warns that it is challenging defining personality as it is such a broad subject. However one definition that encompasses both of the broad positions described in the Penguin Dictionary of Psychology (2001) comes from Robbins et al. (2008). They define personality as “the sum total of ways in which an individual reacts and interacts with others” (Robbins et al. 2008, p.104). They claim that both hereditary and environmental factors affect personality.

Hereditary factors they describe include physical stature, gender, temperament, energy level and facial attractiveness. There are three streams of research supporting the view that hereditary factors determine personality. Robbins et al. (2008) say these are firstly studies of young children that show that personality characteristics such as shyness, aggression and fear can be traced to genetic factors. Secondly research of 100 sets of identical twins who were separated at birth and raised separately showed the twins had so much in common that half of their personality characteristics could be attributed to genetics (Arvey & Bouchard, 1994). Finally there is a stream of research indicating that job satisfaction tends to remain stable for individuals over time, suggesting that external environmental factors are less important than hereditary ones when it comes to job satisfaction (Ilies & Judge, 2003). These results were borne out by the research on separated twins which showed similar levels of job satisfaction between twins even if they are doing completely different jobs. What is notable about these studies is that even with identical twins only half the personality characteristics can be attributed to genetics.

The obvious variety in personalities has led many researchers to attempt to develop a model to describe personality traits (Robbins et al. 2008). They claim that an impressive volume of

research supports the view that there are five basic dimensions to personality. These are extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability and openness to experience. There are also a number of personality variables that are associated with conflict escalation:

- Type A personalities are competitive, impatient and have a sense of time urgency (Pruitt, 2008). They have been shown to engage in more conflict escalation than type B individuals (Pruitt, 2008).

- Hostile attribution bias is a tendency to perceive annoying behaviour from others is done with hostile intent and is a predictor of escalation behaviour (Pruitt, 2008). These are:

- Trait anxiety refers to people who tend to see situations as threatening. People with this personality variable perceive more incidents of conflict (Spector & Bruk-Lee, 2008).

- Narcissists have a tendency to escalate conflicts (Pruitt, 2008).

- Trait anger is defined by as a tendency to perceive a variety of situations as provoking anger (Spector & Bruk-Lee, 2008). They contend that people high in trait anger are more prone to escalate conflict at work.

- People whose self esteem is unstable also tend to escalate conflicts (Pruitt, 2008).

## **The Milgram experiments**

Stanley Milgram conducted 18 experiments in the early 1960s which involved subjects being encouraged by an authority figure to provide increasingly powerful electric shocks to other subjects (Benjamin & Simpson, 2009). They say that the significance of these experiments was much more than their resulting in a new appreciation of research ethics. Benjamin and Simpson (2009, p.14) claim:

The obedience studies resulted in sweeping changes in the broad fields of personality and social psychology, including a diminution of the importance of person or trait variables accompanied by an exceptionally strong emphasis on the power of situations as behavioural determinants.

In particular they identify “One of the principal points that emerged from the obedience work was that powerful situations can and do engulf dispositional tendencies.”(Benjamin & Simpson, 2009, p.16). Benjamin and Simpson (2009) identify that in recent years personality has come to describe how people react in different social situations. This indicates that the

definition of personality has changed and now describes aspects of what in the past would have been called behaviour. It also means that what they refer to when they describe 'dispositional tendencies' is this new definition of personality.

While Milgram was apparently the first psychology researcher to identify how power can influence personality Benjamin and Simpson (2009, p.16) claim the view that environmental factors affect personality is now mainstream:

In recent years, personality has increasingly come to be viewed in the context of person-by-situation effects (e.g., the cognitive-affective system [CAPS] theory of personality; see Mischel & Shoda, 1995). These models have redefined personality as the study of how people habitually respond to or react in different types of social situations.

According to the Penguin Dictionary of Psychology (2001) this view of personality is called *situationism*. Situationism blurs the line between what is personality and what is behaviour. While the Penguin Dictionary of Psychology (2001) attributed situationism to Walter Mischel, Benjamin and Simpson (2009) claim that Mischel was influenced by Milgram. That Milgram's research provided the foundations for situationism means that research on power affecting personality/behaviour was the basis of a theory that argues that situations affect personality/behaviour. This clearly implies that power is a core aspect of what is meant by the term situationism.

The significance of situationism and Milgram's research is that it provides evidence that personality, which the CPP Global Human Capital Report (2008) identifies as the main source of workplace conflict, can change and is influenced by power. This means that it is incorrect to assume personality conflicts are purely about individual issues as systemic factors, such as power, may be causing the personality conflicts.

However the problem personality poses for conflict researchers is that it does not provide a reliable tool to predict conflict behaviours. Folger et al. (2005) stress that there is an extensive body of research on personality traits that has shown that they do not result in consistent conflict behaviour in all situations. An explanation of why this may be the case is provided by social constructionism (See chapter three for an explanation of social constructionism).

## **A social constructionist view of personality**

According to Burr (2003) the thinking that there is a genetically derived aspect to our personality is essentialist and sees humans as having their own unique essence or nature which explains how they behave. She says that most people today believe that with personality there are biological aspects that can be to some extent modified by environmental influences such as childhood experiences. She claims that the fact that we find it so difficult to change our personalities gives credence to this view.

However having described this common sense view of personality Burr (2003) then proceeds to deconstruct it using the social constructionist perspective. She says that the common sense approach is that personality is stable across situations and over time. However this view does not stand up to scrutiny as people tend to behave differently in different situations. As an example she suggests that people would address their bank manager differently to how they would address a close friend. According to Burr (2003) this example means we can expect a person to behave differently in different situations and this poses a serious challenge to psychologists.

Burr (2003) points out that personality is not something that can actually be proven to exist. She says the common sense view is that personality is inside us. However when we think of personality associated words such as shy or friendly they depend on the presence of other people to have meaning. Burr (2003) says that as people are not friendly or shy when they are alone on a desert island the common sense view is problematic.

She claims that if there is an essentialist personality inside humans then we should be able to find a consistent understanding of it amongst all human beings. However she asserts this is not the case as there are cultures where people account for their behaviour by referring to spirits. Furthermore she says there are cultures where emotions are not viewed as being unique to individuals.

Burr (2003) says that in our daily lives we act as if there is such a thing as a personality. However she claims this does not justify the conclusion we have a real personality, claiming this requires a very big leap in thinking:

The social constructionist position, in addition to questioning the concept of personality itself, is that whatever personal qualities we may display are a function of

the particular cultural, historical and relational circumstances in which we are located. (Burr, 2003, p.35).

The social constructionist position highlights the problems that the concept of personality is facing. What it suggests is that behaviour is fluid and changeable. However the view that there are genetic aspects to personality is backed by solid research (Arvey & Bouchard, 1994). Thus personality is a contentious subject.

As the CPP Global Human Capital Report (2008) identified personality clashes and warring egos as the number one source of workplace conflict it is clear that it cannot be overlooked as a factor in workplace conflict. Furthermore as the research section in this thesis uses a grounded theory approach the answers given by participants are critical. As they gave answers that reflected what Burr (2003) describes as the common sense view of personality it is important that the literature review takes a position consistent with this. The all inclusive definition given by Robbins et al. (2008) and adopted in this literature review therefore needs to be considered a useful current definition that may change.

## **Mindsets**

One interesting aspect affecting personality emerged from research on mindsets. McGuigan and Popp (2007) claim that much of the research on conflict resolution is based on the assumption that people actually have the capacity to manage conflict constructively and they claim that this assumption is mistaken. They contend that it is not possible for conflict to be resolved if one of the parties is incapable of managing conflict in a way that can deliver win-win outcomes. They rely on work from Kegan (1982) who has created a continuum of three mindsets.

The first of these they describe as instrumental. People with an instrumental mindset have a concrete orientation to the world, inability to think abstractly or see other points of view and a preoccupation with themselves. As instrumental people are unable to look at things from others perspectives it is unrealistic to expect them to be able to act collaboratively in conflict situations. The second mindset is described as affiliative. People who have an affiliative mindset are concerned with how others view them, try not to offend others and can easily understand others perspectives. The third mindset is the self-authoring. People who have a

self authoring mindset have both a minimal concern for others views and the ability to see multiple other perspectives at the same time. McGuigan and Popp (2007) claim that much of the research on conflict resolution assumes that all the parties involved have a self authoring mindset and that this may be a mistake. Their findings suggest that compromise and collaboration may be strategies that are out of reach of some people.

### **Group dynamics**

Pruitt (2008) claims that individual personality variables tend to have less relevance with respect to predicting conflict escalation when it comes to group environments. In these settings group behaviours are what matters. Pruitt (2008) points out that groups tend to escalate conflicts more than individuals do. Furthermore some groups are more likely to escalate conflicts than others. Pruitt (2008) identifies groups with a culture of honour, requiring retaliation in response to personal slights, as an example of a type of group that is more likely to escalate conflict. As organisations are clearly group environments Pruitt's research is especially relevant to a study of workplace conflict. From a group perspective Pruitt (2008) claims the level of retaliation is negatively correlated to the level of bonds that exist between groups. There is also a relationship between the structures of groups and the level of retaliation. Coleman (1957) found that escalation between groups was much less likely when there were crosscutting rather than overlapping structures in place. Crosscutting structures are those where there are strong bonds between important members of the various groups in a community. Overlapping structures are those where subgroup members are only bonded to each other. Thus the more human the face of the other group is the less intergroup escalation occurs.

### **Organisational culture**

Organisational culture reflects societal culture for two reasons (Sinha, 2008). These are firstly that organisations are creations of society formed to meet the needs and objectives of societies. Secondly individuals in organisations acquire societal values and practices during their socialisation that they bring into the organisations that they join. However Zaheer and Zaheer (1997) stress that organisational culture is not the same as societal culture. This is

because if it were so then all organisations within a society would have the same culture. Sinha (2008) identifies a number of reasons why organisational culture differs from societal culture. Firstly he points out that societal culture evolves over a much longer time period than organisational culture. Secondly while societal culture evolves in an unplanned manner, organisational culture is carefully planned and implemented by management. Finally Sinha (2008) claims organisations are more open to global influences than societies. He says the most important feature of organisational culture is that it is formed by the leader of an organisation and his team of top managers. These points explain why organisational culture needs to be discussed separately from societal culture.

Organisational culture appears to be an often overlooked yet important aspect of workplace conflict. Not many researchers stress the importance of organisational culture. For example Tillett and French (2006) discuss workplace conflict but do not mention organisational culture and Lulofs and Cahn (2005) do not view workplace conflict as a standalone category of conflict and so do not consider organisational culture. However Morrill (1995) claims organisational culture is the major factor influencing how managers handle conflicts. Morrill (1995) believes that it is organisational structure that creates the culture, implying that cultures can be changed by restructuring. This seems an overly simplistic approach as it overlooks the impact of management on culture.

### **Organisational culture defined**

Beyerlein and Harris (2004 p.224) define organisational culture as “a pattern of shared organisational values, basic underlying assumptions and informal norms that guide the way work is accomplished in an organisation. It is the unwritten way that work gets done and does not necessarily align with formal policies and procedures”. Neuhauser, Bender and Stromberg (2000) disagree with this as they believe the formal policies and procedures form part of the culture of an organisation. This position is consistent with that of Morrill (2005). They claim that there are three layers of culture with organisations. These radiate out from a core in concentric rings. At the centre are the shared underlying assumptions and core values of the organisation. Neuhauser et al. (2000) say the underlying assumptions are often



unwritten and reflect attitudes to such things as whether the culture is individualist or collectivist. Core values are usually written and represent the core beliefs of an organisation. Neuhauser et al. (2000, p.6) cite 3M as an example with their core values of “Thou shalt not kill a new product idea, tolerance for honest mistakes and respect for personal initiative and individual growth”. The middle layer represents organisational behaviours and habits and comprises both formal and informal policies and habits (Neuhauser et al., 2000). The final layer according to Neuhauser et al. (2000) is the symbols and language of the organisation. This layer includes logos, colours, uniforms and slogans.

There are a large number of different approaches as to how organisational culture should be differentiated. For example Sinha (2008) identifies more than ten different approaches to differentiating organisational culture. While this literature review will not delve into all the different cultures, a non-dual organisational culture has recently emerged that is important to consider. This is because it is reasonable to assume that collaborative conflict resolution processes are more likely to occur in a collaborative workplace culture than one that is ruled by competitive dualistic thinking. Beyerlein and Harris (2004) call this non-dual culture ‘collaborative culture’. They describe it as a workplace culture where collaboration is the habit, staff spend their energy and time looking for partners, staff understand how to use groups to deal with problems and staff deal with conflicts as soon as they arise through utilising groups of appropriate individuals. They contrast this approach with a dysfunctional dualistic blame culture within an organisation where problems are avoided, time and energy is spent looking for scapegoats, staff work against each other and collaboration has to be forced on staff. While this thesis has a focus on conflict resolution rather than organisational culture the emergence of collaborative workplace cultures and their impact on levels of workplace conflict would be a very interesting area to explore in other research.

### **Concluding comments**

While there are many variables that may affect the level of destructive conflict occurring within organisations it appears from the review in this literature review that culture and gender differences do not provide an explanation as to why levels of destructive conflict vary. As the CPP Global Human Capital Report (2008) results showed that levels of destructive conflict within organisations varied and the worst 10% of organisations had levels of

destructive conflict three times that of the remaining 90% it appears that organisational culture is the critical variable element that affects the level of destructive conflict within organisations. It also appears that personality has a role to play.

Having now completed a discussion of conflict and some of the various factors that might affect how it manifests in the workplace it is now time to consider what organisations can do to deal with it. The next section looks at Alternative Dispute Resolution and the contribution it can make to reducing levels of destructive workplace conflict.

## **Section 2.7: Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)**

According to Scimecca (1993) the beginnings of the ADR movement date back to 1976 and the American Bar Association sponsored “National Conference on the Causes of Popular Dissatisfaction with the Administration of Justice”. The conference concluded that the pressure on the congested legal system could be eased by utilizing alternative forms of dispute resolution. The acronym ADR became a key concept of conflict resolution following this conference and ADR rapidly evolved. A key part of this evolution has been that what ADR represents has expanded to the point that it became apparent that the word alternative was no longer particularly appropriate (Scimecca, 1993). For example the US Department of Justice convened an Ad Hoc Panel on “Dispute Resolution and Public Policy” in 1983 that defined ADR as including “all methods practices and techniques, formal and informal, within and outside courts, that are used to resolve disputes” (Administrative Conference of the U.S., 1987, p.12). Scimecca (1993) disagrees with this definition and suggests that it should be defined to cover alternatives to the court system rather than being all inclusive.

Scimecca’s position is not particularly well supported by other social scientists. Chatterjee and Lefcovitch (2008) agree with Scimecca and define ADR as “any non-court method of settling disputes” (Chatterjee and Lefcovitch, 2008, p.3). However Riekert (1990), Mackie (1991), Lulofs and Cahn (2000) and Cahn and Abigail (2007) all take the view that ADR should broadly include all options for settling disputes including use of the courts. Mackie goes as far as implying that this debate is now decided when he states that “most proponents of ADR are now agreed that the expression ‘alternative’ is an inappropriate one” (Mackie, 1991, p.4).

The reasons that Mackie gives for making this statement are compelling. He claims that as approximately 90% of cases that are destined to reach court never actually make it into the courtroom then court decided disputes are much less common than disputes decided outside court. This means that it is the disputes` that go to court that should be looked at as being alternative as they represent a small minority to the mainstream which are resolved outside court. Mackie (1991) also points out that many ADR processes are now being integrated into court procedures, blurring the lines between the courts and ADR processes and making it difficult to separate the two and thus difficult to continue to refer to ADR as an alternative to the courts. He adds that there is a growing consensus that lawyers and judges need to become more aware of ADR as there are tools available within ADR that may be more suitable to resolve some disputes that appear in court than traditional litigation. This collectively indicates that ADR processes and court processes are merging and so the idea of trying to keep them separate needs to be dropped. Fiadjoe (2004) provides support for this position as he asserts that ADR is now offered by all reputable law schools and lawyers now need greater skills in dispute resolution than they need in litigation. For these reasons the word 'alternative' is clearly no longer appropriate in ADR. It is also clear that ADR covers all options for deciding disputes.

The word 'resolution' is also the subject of dispute. Earlier in this literature review the differing views of what constituted resolution were discussed. A broad definition of resolution as meaning a win-win outcome where both sides were satisfied with the result was then identified as the most appropriate (Lulofs & Cahn 2000). However all the definitions of ADR considered in this literature review include acceptance that ADR includes methods that give win-lose and lose-lose outcomes as well as win-win. Accordingly the word 'resolution' is not appropriate to describe what ADR has now become. It should be replaced with a word that covers win-win, win-lose and lose-lose outcomes.

There is also an issue with the word 'dispute' which was defined earlier in this thesis as conflicts that have reached the point where the parties cannot resolve them by themselves. ADR techniques include processes such as holding difficult conversations (Brandon & Robertson, 2007) where the parties actually do try to resolve their differences by themselves. In this sense the word 'dispute' may also not now be appropriate in describing what ADR has become.

In fact ADR is already being challenged as an acronym as Olson-Buchanan and Boswell (2008) call ADR based workplace conflict management systems organisational dispute resolution (ODR) systems. Lipsky et al. (2003) regularly use the term 'Conflict Management' to describe the processes that ADR now cover, although they do not propose that ADR be renamed 'Conflict Management'. As there is confusion about what constitutes ADR and the acronym ADR clearly does not reflect what ADR has now become there is a strong argument for replacing ADR with a term that clearly defines what ADR now represents, such as 'Conflict Management'.

### **ADR and workplace conflict management systems**

According to Bingham and Chachere (1999) ADR based workplace conflict management systems have become so widely accepted that by 1999 in the US about half of the major private employers in the US had ADR-based workplace conflict management systems. Stitt (1998) explains the logic behind the adoption of ADR systems by organisations in a way that is consistent with systems theory. He argues that all effective organisations have goals. As conflict exists in all areas of life and can be dealt with constructively or destructively, all organisations presumably share a goal of wanting to deal with it constructively. He believes successful organisations manage conflict in a way that improves relationships and leaves everyone satisfied with the processes used to arrive at solutions to conflicts, even if they do not agree with the actual solutions. Stitt (1988) does not explain how it is possible for someone to be satisfied with an agreement they do not agree with.

Masters and Albright (2002) identify what they see as the main reasons for the trend for US organisations to adopt ADR systems to deal with workplace conflict. These are that a growing number of workplace conflicts are getting resolved in courts and other state controlled venues. When a conflict reaches this point the risks and costs to organisations rise and they lose control over managing the process and the outcome. This is happening more frequently as the law has given aggrieved employees more rights and remedies. Organisations are responding to this by turning to ADR. This implies ADR is being adopted so organisations can disempower their staff.

Masters and Albright (2002) describe a variety of ADR approaches that organisations might choose to control the process and outcomes of disputes with their employees. Their apparent comfort with the idea of organisations using ADR to control their staff raises the question of whether their research is impartial. It is to be expected that the powerful will use research to normalise their efforts to gain more power over the powerless. The Masters and Albright (2002) line of argument normalising the disempowerment of staff is consistent with their producing research that serves the interests of the powerful.

Lipsky et al. (2003) approach this issue slightly more carefully. They claim that there are four key trends that have led to the move towards ADR systems. The first of these is dissatisfaction with the legal system. They say the courts and legal agencies are viewed with near hostility by nearly everyone. This contradicts Masters and Albright (2002) who say ADR is being adopted by (powerful) organisations because the legal system is increasingly protecting the interests of (disempowered) employees. The Lipsky et al. (2003) position was not supported by evidence and seems hard to believe.

A second trend Lipsky et al. (2003) identify is a long term decline in the labour movement. They claim that the demise of the union movement has left a void that human resources systems have unsuccessfully attempted to fill. What they fail to mention is that the demise of the union movement has resulted in disempowered employees becoming further disempowered. Thus this trend can also be identified as being that the powerful are actually increasing their control over the powerless.

A third trend they identify is a desire to reduce levels of destructive conflict as being a main reason for organisations wanting to introduce ADR based conflict management systems. This implies that organisations that have introduced ADR based systems did so believing they would help reduce levels of destructive workplace conflict.

The final trend that Lipsky et al. (2003) identified is that deregulation and increased competition have forced organisations to look at their operational effectiveness. This has led to a realization that efficient workforces offer organisations a competitive advantage. Lipsky et al. (2003) state that this desire for improved performance has resulted in organisations moving towards adopting ADR systems. This implies that a desire to reduce the cost of destructive workplace conflict is a key reason for organisations to want to introduce ADR systems. As Masters and Albright (2002) assert that ADR has failed to reduce levels of

destructive conflict, Lipsky et al. (2003) have identified a trend that does not actually exist. That Lipsky et al. (2003) make such weak and contentious arguments as to why ADR is popular raises concerns about their impartiality. Their arguments on this subject are more consistent with normalising the position of the powerful than with impartial research.

A reason for adopting ADR systems that has been missed by both groups of researchers is that it can be assumed that organisations like their conflicts to be dealt with as discretely as possible. Having the media able to report on numerous conflicts being resolved in court is unlikely to be seen by organisations as a desirable situation. Accordingly the discretion offered by ADR systems is likely to be a powerful reason for organisations adopting them.

### **Deconstructing ADR**

Lipsky et al. (2003) identify the main strengths of ADR as being that it offers faster, cheaper and more efficient means of solving disputes than the legal system offers. Furthermore relative to litigation many ADR processes are more confidential. ADR also enables disputes to be dealt with in a manner that is appropriate for the individuals involved and the issues in contention. This means to some extent the ADR process can be customized to suit the situation, something that litigation does not allow. However these strengths are dependent on ADR being able to deliver justice in a fair and impartial manner and the critics of ADR claim that ADR does not do this. Lipsky et al. (2003) assert, for example, that in the US there is a trend by employers to force employees to waive their legal rights and accept arbitration. This shows how ADR processes which transfer dispute resolution from public forums to private ones can sideline employees' legal rights and are being used as a means by organisations to disempower and control their staff.

Lipsky et al. (2003) claim another way employees are disadvantaged by ADR has to do with representation. They say that in arbitration and mediation employees are not necessarily represented by advocates of their own choosing whereas employers almost always are. Many employees cannot afford to hire high quality representatives and this puts them in a weak position. One aspect of this is known as the repeat player effect. Bingham (1998) analyzed a large number of arbitration awards and found that employers who made repeated use of arbitration won the vast majority of their cases while employers who used arbitration just

once lost the majority of their cases. She was able to conclude that employers who are repeat players at arbitration have advantages that one time players, who are usually employees, do not have. This situation shows ADR has drifted away from its original focus, which was helping those who did not have access to the law (Harrington & Merry, 1988).

Another weakness of ADR is that with it there is an assumption that third party neutrals can actually be neutral. This assumption should be challenged according to Lane (1982). This is because the values that lead to unequal power relationships tend to be inadvertently supported by third party neutrals (Lane, 1982).

Scimecca (1993) takes a more theoretical perspective on the weaknesses of ADR than Lipsky et al. (2003). He claims that without an underlying theory ADR will remain an instrument of social control, keeping the less powerful in their place. He adds that those that practice ADR are in a difficult position because in his view they cannot become true professionals until ADR incorporates some sort of theoretical base to underpin its practices. Presumably this is because a theoretical base would provide conflict professionals with a platform of independence.

Abel (1982) says that ADR has its roots in individualism and as such views the causes of conflict as being from individual responsibility rather than inequalities in society. This means from his perspective ADR denies that systemic factors might be causing conflict. Scimecca (1993) appears to agree with Abel (1982) as he claims ADR does not take unequal power distributions into account and tries to resolve conflicts assuming both parties have equal power. This will tend to see results coming out in favour of the more powerful (Scimecca, 1993).

The most serious criticism of ADR has to do with it failing to reduce levels of destructive workplace conflict. In the US, where ADR based conflict management systems are most popular “conflict at work is on the rise.” (Masters & Albright, 2002, p.29). This shows that ADR is not actually delivering a reduction in levels of destructive workplace conflict. This is a concern as ADR has previously been defined as including all options for resolving disputes. However if one assumes that it is possible to reduce levels of workplace conflicts this means that ADR options are not being applied properly. The failure of ADR is consistent with the thoughts of Burton (1990) who claims that the conflict resolution methods that now form ADR have been used throughout history and largely failed to reduce the number and intensity

of conflicts. As they have failed in the past Burton questioned why they should be maintained as they would likely continue to fail in the future.

On reflection, reducing numbers of destructive conflicts may be an unrealistic expectation of the conflict resolution methods that constitute ADR. While a few ADR approaches, such as holding difficult conversations and open door policies by management, can be used early in a conflict, these techniques are relatively peripheral. The major types of ADR are arbitration, adjudication, mediation and negotiation and these usually operate once conflict has become escalated and destructive. An analogy that explains this point is that of conflict occurring at the top of a cliff and destructive conflict resulting in the parties falling off the cliff. Most ADR techniques can be compared to a hospital treating injured people at the bottom of the cliff. Some patients get treated using negotiation, some with arbitration, some with mediation and some with adjudication. The problem is that no matter how well the hospital at the bottom of the cliff operates it cannot reduce the numbers of people falling off the cliff and should not be held responsible for this. What is needed to reduce numbers falling off the cliff are preventive measures acting as a fence at the top of the cliff. This line of thought suggests that it is the timing of the ADR intervention that may be the reason that ADR is failing to reduce levels of destructive conflicts in America and that ADR, if used before conflicts become destructive, may enjoy much greater effectiveness. As the research reviewed on ADR focused on ADR processes rather than timing it appears that more research needs to occur in this area.

This then raises the issue of why organisations have so readily adopted ADR based conflict management systems, when they are not effective at reducing levels of workplace conflict? There seem to be a number of possible explanations:

- Organisations have mistakenly believed that ADR based conflict management systems will reduce levels of destructive conflict in their workplaces. They have not understood the importance of timing and in particular dealing with conflict before it becomes destructive.

- As ADR broadly covers all options for dealing with conflicts organisations have no alternative but to use ADR if they want to address problem levels of destructive conflict. As ADR has evolved with a bottom of the cliff focus, organisations had no option but to adopt this focus with their ADR based systems.

- These systems are being introduced by organisations in order to further disempower workers (Burton, 1990).

- Organisations value privacy and keeping disputes out of public view is seen by organisations as important enough to warrant establishing complex ADR systems.



-Being able to better manage the conflicts that occur is sufficient to warrant the expense involved even though the volume of conflicts is not affected by these systems.

Apart from the last explanation all of these reasons appear to have merit. For organisations to spend money on conflict management systems in the knowledge they will not reduce levels of conflict seems unlikely. Organisations are businesses that consider investments on the basis of return and an ADR proposal that offers little in the way of identifiable return is unlikely to appeal. That both Burton (1990) and Lipsky et al. (2003) were able to identify both theoretical and actual examples of ADR being used as a tool by management to disempower workers means that this is a compelling explanation for the popularity of ADR.

### **Concluding comments**

ADR has been introduced to around half the private organisations in America as a means to deal with workplace conflict. However ADR is not actually delivering a reduction in levels of destructive workplace conflict. While a range of reasons explain why ADR has become so popular with employers, there is evidence that some employers are introducing these systems to further disempower workers. That ADR is failing to stem the increase in levels of destructive conflict in the country where it has been most widely adopted indicates that there are serious flaws with ADR. One possible explanation for this failure is that ADR denies the role of systemic factors in workplace conflict (Able, 1982). Another is that ADR has become a tool of control as Scimecca (1993) warns is possible.

### **ADR in New Zealand**

In New Zealand the main ADR methods being used are mediation and arbitration with mediation being by far the most popular. The Ministry of Justice (2004) report on ADR included results from a poll of 145 practitioners surveyed as to what actually constituted ADR. Results showed 99% thought mediation was part of ADR, 83% agreed that arbitration was and less than half thought formal negotiation was part of ADR. The report identified a trend that arbitration was becoming less popular due to dissatisfaction with outcomes and relative expense. They supported their view that mediation was the main ADR in New

Zealand with data showing that in 1992 mediation was used to settle 36.6% of unfilled High Court disputes whereas arbitration was used to settle only 6.9%.

In terms of workplace conflict in New Zealand, Chauvel and Spackman (2005) assert under section 144 of the ERA (Employment Relations Act, 2000) mediation services must be provided to support all employment relationships. In accordance with this the Department of Labour has a workplace group which provides free mediation services. These services are required by section 144 of the ERA. Chauvel and Spackman (2005) claim private mediation is also anticipated by section 154 of the ERA. Thus mediation is the most popular ADR process and has statutory recognition in New Zealand with respect to being used to resolve workplace conflicts. This shows how mediation is the ADR approach favoured by legislation for dealing with workplace conflict. When compared with arbitration it has another notable advantage. This is that mediation can be a collaborative process that delivers win-win outcomes whereas arbitration is a competitive process that generally delivers win-lose outcomes. This thesis will now briefly look at arbitration but then focus on mediation as it is clearly the critical ADR for workplace conflict in New Zealand.

## **Section 2.8: Arbitration and Mediation**

### **Arbitration**

According to Cahn and Abigail (2007) arbitration is a process whereby a neutral third party listens to both sides of a dispute and makes a binding ruling. They add that usually there are no avenues of appeal following arbitration. However if both sides agree the ruling, which is known as an award in New Zealand, can be appealed (Pitchforth, 2007). In New Zealand arbitration is covered by the Arbitration Act 1996 and Arbitration Amendment Act 2007.

The advantages of arbitration are that it can deliver quick decisions and those involved have some degree of control over the process (Pitchforth, 2007). This means they can have input into areas such as where and when the arbitration will take place and who the arbitrator is. Another advantage of arbitration is that it is usually relatively cheap and the awards it delivers are final, meaning disputes end with arbitration.

Disadvantages, according to Pitchforth (2007), are that the law does not allow arbitrators to use some techniques that mediators are allowed to use. Another disadvantage is that in some cases one of the parties could be better served by the law rather than having an arbitrator giving a practical ruling. Another disadvantage with arbitration is that it utilizes an adversarial process that results in win-lose outcomes. This means arbitration delivers outcomes that Lulofs and Cahn (2000) would describe as conflict management rather than conflict resolution.

## **Mediation**

### **Challenges in defining Mediation**

According to Boulle (1996) defining mediation is problematic. Boulle (1996) gives a range of reasons for this. He claims mediation refers to a range of models with different core features and so is difficult to differentiate. Macfarlane (2003, p. 289) agrees with this, claiming the range of processes and practices covered by mediation reflects “a diversity of philosophies, styles and strategies” that make it very difficult to narrowly define. Boulle (1996) says that there is also little consensus as to how key aspects of mediation such as neutrality are defined. Furthermore there is no underlying theoretical base supporting mediation and different users tend to define mediation according to their own interests. Boulle (1996) also says mediation may be defined both in respect to its underlying philosophy and in respect to its operational features and the fact that there is broad diversity in the way that mediation is practiced makes definition difficult.

### **Features of mediation**

Given the problems in defining mediation outlined by Boulle (1996) it makes sense to consider the features of mediation as well as a definition in order to develop an understanding of what it represents. Kruk (2000) identifies seven core aspects of mediation. These are:

- 1- Mediation is a process that has an internal structure and clearly identifiable stages. In this process the role of the mediator is to establish the framework and control the negotiation process.
- 2- There can be no mediation without a conflict or dispute as this is what is mediated.

- 3- Mediation emphasizes collaboration as the preferred approach to dealing with the dispute. This means it assumes that the parties will behave in a balanced and respectful manner towards each other.
- 4- The mediator assists negotiations between the parties.
- 5- The mediator must remain neutral and impartial.
- 6- Empowerment is seen as fundamental to mediation in the sense that the parties are empowered by the process to make their own decisions and bear responsibility for the outcome. The mediator does not have the power to even make recommendations.
- 7- The process involves the parties voluntarily agreeing to a mutually acceptable agreement that is made without any form of coercion occurring.

### **Mediation defined**

There are numerous definitions of mediation and all share many common features. However rather than comparing the various definitions and in the interests of avoiding unnecessary complexity a preferred definition is as follows:

“Mediation is a collaborative conflict resolution process in which two or more parties in dispute are assisted in their negotiation by a neutral and impartial third party and empowered to voluntarily reach their own mutually acceptable settlement of the issues in dispute. The mediator structures and facilitates the process by which the parties make their own decisions and determine the outcomes in a way that satisfies the interests of all the parties in the dispute” (Kruk, 2000, p.4).

This is a very broad definition that to some degree addresses the weaknesses of narrow definitions identified by Boulle (1996).

### **Why use mediation**

While mediation is required to be used by law in employment disputes in New Zealand there are a number of reasons why organisations like to use it according to Goldman et al. (2008). Mediation is useful when there is a need for an ongoing relationship after the dispute, when there is a need for a speedy settlement, when keeping expenses under control is important and when there is a need for the dispute to be kept confidential. Goldman et al. (2008) say that historically organisations have been less willing to turn to mediation than their staff. They cite figures showing that employees want to mediate 87% of discrimination cases while employers only want to use mediation in 31% of the cases. Reasons employers are reluctant to use mediation include; cases which lack merit, where they may have to pay money, where

the opposing party is seen as unlikely to compromise, where the honesty of witnesses is an issue and where the law offers clear protection to the employer.

### **Differentiating mediation from other ADR processes**

Kelly (1983) describes the features of mediation from the perspective of how it differs from other ADR processes. These identifying features of mediation are firstly that mediation usually has a distinct goal that is usually limited to resolving the issues that are the subject of the mediation. Secondly the mediation process is usually limited by time and is a task and goal focused process that involves psychological reflection and has a focus on the future. Thirdly because mediation is future focused, assessment is limited. Finally while the mediator is a neutral facilitator he (or she) is an active and directive facilitator whose role extends to proposing options. While Kelly (1983) provides an interesting perspective that helps understand mediation it is debateable whether the features of mediation he describes actually do distinguish mediation from other ADR processes. For example arbitration and adjudication also usually have a distinct goal that is also limited to resolving the issues that are the subject of the dispute and are also are usually limited by time.

### **The mediation process**

While there are numerous mediation models the mediation process is similar in all of them (Brandon & Robertson, 2007). This is that there are three basic stages. These are:

#### **Pre-mediation**

The first phase occurs prior to the mediation and sees an agreement between the parties to seek mediation and the appointment of a neutral unbiased mediator (Cahn & Abigail, 2007). The parties then meet separately with the mediator as this both establishes rapport and is consistent with a critical requisite of mediation. This is that the parties believe the mediator will listen to them attentively (Doherty& Guyler, 2008).

## **The mediation session**

Masters and Albright (2002) say the typical mediation session begins with an opening statement. This is made by the mediator and sets out the purpose of the mediation and the procedures that will be followed (Cahn & Abigail, 2007). They claim these include that the mediation can be terminated at any stage as it is voluntary and that the objective of the mediation is to arrive at a written mutual agreement that both sides are at least comfortable with. Lulofs and Cahn (2000) contend that communication rules are also explained at this stage. These include that both parties respect time constraints, refrain from interrupting each other, take turns talking and look at each other rather than the mediator. Once the procedures have been explained the parties' statements are tabled and a timetable for the mediation is agreed on (Brandon & Robertson, 2007).

Doherty and Guyler (2008) claim that following these preliminaries both parties explain their positions. The process usually begins with the complainant giving his statement (Cahn & Abigail, 2007). Following each statement the mediator gives a summary and identifies the issues that were raised and the position the party took on these issues. Brandon and Robertson (2007) say that at this stage the discussion is generally confused and wide ranging and the parties are usually behaving competitively.

Once the dispute has been described a process of negotiation occurs where the issues are discussed (Boulle, 1996; Jones & Goldblatt, 1998). This stage involves data gathering, exploring needs and interests and generating options for settlement (Kruk, 2000). There may be meetings involving the mediator and either one or both parties. If this phase is successful the discussion becomes clear and an understanding of the issues is arrived at that results in specific statements being agreed to (Doherty & Guyler, 2008). Brandon and Robertson (2007) add that at this stage the parties explore alternatives and agree on a list of options.

## **The ending phase**

The final phase is described by Kruk (2000) as the ending phase. This involves generating and evaluating options and then settlement of the dispute. This results in the production of a written list of steps that both sides have agreed to. As agreements are voluntary it is important

that ongoing testing occurs following the agreement to ensure the steps agreed to actually deliver the outcomes that the parties desired (Doherty & Guyler, 2008).

### **Theoretical underpinnings**

Kruk (2000) identifies four theoretical frameworks that are relevant to mediation:

The first of these is negotiation theory (Fisher & Ury 1991). One the key aspects of principled negotiation that they identify is shifting the parties from position based bargaining to interest based negotiating. Fisher and Ury (1991) define interests as the concerns and needs of the parties that must be met if they are to be comfortable with outcomes. To identify interests requires identifying the underlying interests that have led the parties to take a particular position and then comparing the sets of interests to identify those that are common. This is a core concept of mediation according to Kruk (2000).

Kruk (2000) also believes that communications theory and mediation share common ground. He says the strategic use of questioning, reflection, metaphor and neutral and neutralizing language are essential principles of mediation and are also cornerstones of communication theory.

Another theory that mediation has elements of is the problem-solving model as it provides mediation with a staged process applicable to a wide range of scenarios (Kruk, 2000).

Finally, Kruk (2000) claims mediation focuses on the system as a whole and in this respect shares the systems theory perspective that each system has a unique integrated character and in this respect the whole of the system is greater than the sum of its parts.

From this discussion it is clear that mediation has elements of many different theories within it. This is symptomatic of the enormous diversity within mediation that led Boule to conclude it was difficult to define.

### **Differentiating mediation, strengths and weaknesses of the various models**

There are a wide range of approaches as to how mediation should be differentiated. For example Riskin (2003) differentiates mediation by using a grid which has two dimensions

and four quadrants. The dimensions are the role of the mediator (from directive to elicitive) and how the problem is defined (from narrow to broad). The strength of Riskin's approach is that it provides a systematic framework through which to analyse the various conceptual models in respect to each other (Alexander, 2008).

Boulle (2005) differentiates mediation by identifying four models: settlement, therapeutic, evaluative and facilitative. This approach is similar to the approach taken by Riskin. Bush and Folger (1994) take a different approach as they focus on transformative mediation and differentiate mediation according to ideology. They identify three categories of mediation; relational mediation, problem solving mediation and harmony mediation.

Alexander (2008, p.107) attempts to draw all the different approaches together through the development of a model that focuses on six types of mediation and these will now be described by summarizing how Alexander (2008) explains them:

Settlement mediation in contrast focuses on the process rather than the problem but shares a similar basis of interaction with EAM, positional bargaining discourse. The process involves less intervention than EAM, with mediators adopting the role of positional bargaining coach and the parties being given more autonomy. Settlement mediators are often selected for their technical or legal knowledge as parties often see skills in these areas as important. Settlement mediation is useful when positional bargaining is more appropriate than interest based bargaining, when the outcome is seen as more important than maintaining the relationship and in single issue disagreements. According to Kruk (2000) the assumptions underpinning settlement mediation have come under heavy criticism. One criticism is that settlement mediation is inappropriate for some situations. "The short term, task-oriented, sequentially structured and future focused nature of settlement mediation, provides a blunt instrument for the resolution of disputes in which unresolved emotional issues are preventing one or both parties from effectively negotiating" (Kruk, 2000, p.8). Another criticism is that the settlement model assumes that the parties have the ability to articulate their positions and the skills to both negotiate effectively and solve problems in a balanced way that arrives at a fair agreement. Kruk (2000) claims that in reality there is usually an imbalance of power, skills and knowledge and this means it gives an advantage to the more powerful and the better negotiator. Furthermore deadlocks are more difficult to break as settlement mediation does not look for creative solutions. It also tends to overlook the relationship between the parties



as well as their needs and interests. Finally the presumption of mediator neutrality should be challenged (this issue is fully addressed later in this chapter).

Facilitative mediation is also known as interest-based mediation. It shares a focus on process intervention with settlement mediation but differs as it focuses on integrative interest based negotiation while settlement mediation focuses on distributive positional bargaining. It works well when parties see their relationship as important, when they can negotiate on the basis of there being equal power, in multiple issue disputes and when creative solutions are needed. It has weaknesses where the parties do not have equal power and cannot negotiate as equals, where time is an issue and where there is a danger that one side may reveal confidential information given during the process at a later date.

Transformative mediation is dialogue and process based and tries to transform how the parties relate to each other. Mediators tend to be selected on the basis of their relationship skills and knowledge of the cause of conflict and of the behavioural sciences. The mediator's role is to create an environment where the parties can communicate their needs and interests and recognize those of the other party and through this transform how they relate to each other. Therapeutic mediation is a type of transformative mediation and this means that the various methods of therapeutic mediation such as narrative mediation are also transformative. Transformative mediation is useful where parties are prepared to address an underlying cause of conflict before addressing the actual dispute. It is also useful where the dispute is about a relationship, where emotional and behavioural issues are at stake and when the parties disagree on the basis of values. It has weaknesses as it is the most time consuming form of mediation, it does little to protect the disempowered, success is highly dependent on the skills of the mediator and it can actually escalate the dispute by uncovering more issues that need to be dealt with.

Expert advisory mediation (EAM) refers to mediation that is done by senior lawyers or other professionals who have been selected both for their expertise and their seniority. It involves a high level of mediator intervention in the problem, a narrow focus on the problem and a positional approach. It works well where the issue is complex and the parties are not experts, where the parties have unrealistic views of the merits of their case, where the parties are not enthusiastic about attending mediation, where the parties want a quick resolution and where the relationship aspects of the dispute are not viewed as important. The main criticisms of

expert advisory mediation are that the mediator assumes a lot of responsibility on behalf of the parties, it tends to neglect the interests of the parties as it focuses on rights and positions, parties may be dissatisfied with the result as they only directly participate in a minor way and this process is very similar to conciliation, case appraisal and neutral evaluation.

Wise counsel mediation combines both a problem focused intervention with an integrative approach. Mediators look at conflicts from the perspective of the broad interests of the parties rather than considering the parties' positions. It attempts to deliver justice in the sense of a fair forum. Mediators do not tend to intervene to coach the parties but to identify interests and options. Mediators are usually selected for their status and sense of fairness. Wise counsel mediation works well in cases where the parties want guidance, in multiple issue disputes, where the parties are reluctant to discuss the issues and where there is a power imbalance between the parties. Flaws with this approach are that the mediator takes on too much responsibility and can get it wrong if their assumptions are inaccurate. Other flaws are that the mediators' impartiality can be compromised by the process, that it is time consuming and that it gives a solution but no guidance in how to manage it subsequent to the mediation.

Tradition based mediation is similar to wise counsel mediation as it is problem focused and tends to use status and wisdom as the criteria for appointing mediators. It has a focus on restorative justice in the sense of restoring harmony to a community or group. It is this prioritizing of community interests ahead of those of the parties that distinguishes it from wise counsel mediation. It is possibly the oldest form of mediation and continues today in many indigenous communities. It works well in collectivist cultures that put the community's interests ahead of the individuals. Tradition based mediation is criticized as it may confirm the dominant culture, may overlook the interests of oppressed minorities and does not leave any space for individual autonomy.

### **Deconstructing mediation**

According to Kruk (2000) the major strength of mediation is that it is a collaborative process that only succeeds when there is a win-win outcome. A second strength is that the mediation process leads to increased perceptions of procedural justice (Ross & Conlon, 2000). Mediation is also popular in the workplace because it is effective. Masters and Albright

(2002) claim figures on mediation in employment disputes in America show around 70 percent of disputes are settled. This is consistent with research from Goldman, Cropranzo, Stein and Benson (2008) showing settlement rates for mediation are usually between 60% and 78%. Furthermore Brett, Barsness and Goldberg (1996) claim that satisfaction rates following workplace mediation are 75% or more. However it should be stressed that these satisfaction rates are short term. Pruitt, Pierce, McGillicuddy, Welton and Castriano (1993) studied 73 mediations and interviewed the participants both immediately afterwards and then again four to eight months later. They concluded there is no relationship between short term satisfaction with the outcomes of mediation and long term satisfaction.

In an apparent effort to downplay the significance of their results Pruitt et al. (1993) identified two possible explanations for these findings. Firstly that agreements reached in a single mediation session are unlikely to deal with entrenched issues in a way that prevents them recurring. Secondly Pruitt et al (1993) posit that agreements have little weight in distressed relationships. As entrenched issues and distressed relationships are features of all escalated conflicts, trying to justify results showing mediation does not deliver long term satisfaction by pointing out that mediation may not work well dealing with escalated conflicts seems a rather weak effort to attribute their results to types of conflict rather than the process of mediation.

Pruitt et al. (1993) failed to identify the most likely explanation of why their research showed there was no correlation between short term levels of satisfaction with outcomes and long term levels. This is that their research may have accurately identified long term satisfaction levels with mediation. This is because of the negotiators dilemma, which says win-win outcomes are unlikely to occur in collaborative conflict resolution processes because it is safe for the parties involved to behave competitively in collaborative negotiations and risky to behave collaboratively (Axelrod, 1984). This means that in theory participants to collaborative processes such as mediation can be expected to behave competitively. Thus it can also be expected that mediation will not deliver long term win-win outcomes and this is what the Pruitt et al. (1993) research revealed.

The Pruitt et al. (1993) research is a single research project, which by itself is not enough to enable generalisations to be made. However because of the theoretical support for their findings provided by the negotiators dilemma, it is likely that the Pruitt et al. (1993) research

has accurately described one of the problematic aspects of mediation. The assumptions many people have about how mediation is a collaborative process that delivers win-win outcomes are seriously challenged both theoretically by the negotiators dilemma and in reality by the Pruitt et al. (1993) research.

### **Inequality in mediation**

According to Wing (2009) there are three main reasons why inequality can occur during mediation. These are that if mediator neutrality is violated, if one party does not have the power necessary to negotiate the deal it wants and if one party fails to raise issues of concern and does not select an outcome of its choice. A fourth source of inequality appears to be where one party is less articulate than the other party and so is disadvantaged in that they have less negotiating ability.

Wing (2009) attributes responsibility for inequality to the participants. She claims that it is the participants who are responsible for seeing that their interests are addressed rather than the mediator. Furthermore it is outside the responsibilities of the mediator to look at external power dynamics and that as long as the mediator is neutral they do not need to worry about complaints of inequality (Wing, 2009).

This reasoning seems both harsh and unconvincing. If there is a power imbalance it seems unfair to hand responsibility to the disempowered party for this situation and claim it is outside the area of concern of the mediator. It also seems that if one party is disempowered in the sense that they are less articulate than the other party then the mediator may have a duty to try and establish an environment where the parties are on more level terms. In workplace mediations between a powerful employer and a relatively powerless employee it is hard to imagine justice being delivered by such an approach unless the mediator has very good interpersonal skills and an accurate perception of gender and power issues.

Another potential source of inequality in mediation is the repeat player effect Bingham (1998) identified as occurring with arbitration. This means if employers make regular and repeated use of mediation it is likely that will become more adept at handling it and win more cases against individual employees who are not regular users of mediation because of this

experience. This is unproven but the logic behind it seems robust enough to suggest that it is probably true.

## **Neutrality**

According to Wing (2009) mediation as a dispute process has the goal of producing a voluntary and consensual outcome through using a mediator. The core values of mediation are neutrality and self determination (Wing, 2009). However there is a body of scholarship that will now be considered, that argues that these critical defining characteristics are idealistic rather than realistic.

Wing (2009) says that neutrality has two aspects, impartiality and equidistance. She defines impartiality as the condition where the mediator does not take sides and equidistance as the condition of being equally removed from each party. Equidistance demands that the mediator deals symmetrically with both parties. According to Grillo (2001) impartiality implies an observer with either no perspective or a completely neutral one. However even if mediators are trying to be impartial, their role always leads them to compare the parties arguments and make some sort of judgment about them (Gerami, 2009). Just listening to the parties statements implies a thought process that involves either a conscious or subconscious evaluation of them (Gerami, 2009). This realization has led Fuller, Kimsey and Mickinney (1992) to claim mediators influence the legitimacy of the parties' perspectives through their interventions, reframing and setting the order of speaking. They claim because of this mediators influence not only the process of mediation but the outcomes as well. Another challenge to the neutrality of mediators is the argument that since mediation is a business, mediators have an interest in building a referral base and a reputation. This means self interest influences mediators in their efforts to seek settlements as mediators have an interest in being viewed positively by clients who are likely to give them repeat business (Kolb, 1996). These types of clients are likely to be organisations rather than individuals.

Even Wing (2009), having argued that power imbalances are not the responsibility of the mediator, admits that heavy criticism of mediation comes from the fact that it does not recognize power imbalances. She says there is an assumption that both sides in a dispute have equal power to both articulate and act. She says this fails to take into account social

inequalities. This means that mediators who remain impartial and equidistant when dealing with situations where there is a power imbalance are not seen as neutral by many in the marginalized groups (Li-On, 2009). Wing (2009) says this has led many in the field to view neutrality as unrealistic and unachievable. Goldberg (2009) perceives the inability to act neutrally as part of human nature. She points out that the recognition that human nature makes neutrality unachievable has led to a shared understanding that all we can do is strive for it. This is a compelling argument and it implies that identifying mediation as being dependent on mediator neutrality is setting it up to fail.

One piece of research performed by Cobb and Rifkin (1991) highlights how hopeless the task of delivering neutrality in mediation is. They found a strong positive correlation between who spoke first in a mediation and what both the outcome and the dominant discourse was. This process was so strong that the first speaker's discourse became the basis for the mediation in more than 80 percent of cases. Their study involved observing 15 mediators and taping 30 mediations. While this sample size is too small to enable generalisations to be made, it shows how taking a symmetrical approach can actually undermine the neutrality of mediation.

Another issue affecting neutrality in mediation has to do with the dominant paradigm. Cobb (1994) claims that narratives that fit with the dominant cultural stories in society have reinforcement behind them that makes them easily understandable to mediators. The power of these narratives is further strengthened if they reflect the life experiences of the mediator (Goldberg, 2009). This also challenges the fairness of taking a symmetrical approach as one party's narrative, supported by both the dominant paradigm and the mediator's lived experience takes less time for the mediator to understand and so should receive less time (Ross, 1995). Ross points out that the dominant paradigm is still present at the table even when it is not put into words. Gerami (2009) contends that it is questionable whether a mediator who is hired because of his knowledge and experience can be described as neutral. Cobb and Rifkin (1991) also challenge whether neutrality is possible. They believe that the concept of neutrality is included in mediation discourse to "obscure the workings of power in mediation" (Cobb and Rifkin, 1991, p.41).

Wherever mediation heads it is important that it is based on realistic principles. Thus the idea of mediation being based on real mediator neutrality needs to be reviewed and possibly

replaced with something more realistic. This may involve taking the position that mediators should only strive to be neutral.

### **Critical theory and mediation**

According to Bush and Folger (1994) the critical view of mediation has been artificially suppressed. Bush and Folger (1994) outline four mediation conceptions. The ‘satisfaction’ story has the goal of satisfying the parties’ dispute by using problem solving. The ‘transformation’ story attempts to promote empathy between the parties and empower them to make a decision. The ‘social justice’ story views mediation as a tool for overcoming societal oppression and the ‘oppression’ story sees mediation as being used to promote the interests of the powerful. While critical theory fits the social justice story, Bush and Folger (1994) contend that the satisfaction model has so dominated mediation that it has stifled mediation development and debate to the detriment of the other stories. This has had the effect of artificially narrowing the field of mediation and suppressing debates that otherwise may have led to improvements. Bush and Folger (1994) say the satisfaction story relies on the mediator taking a neutral stance. Taking this position without analysing the power of the parties in conflict can hide the power imbalances that exist and actually undermine the efforts of the disempowered by supporting the ideology of the powerful (Eide, 1972). Critical theory therefore calls for conflict resolution practitioners to use the social justice story to view mediation. This means mediators should “state power imbalances, take a partial position with the underdog and seek to go beyond settlement, helping parties change oppressive social relationships” (Hansen, 2008, p.412).

Eide (1972) claims workplace conflict resolution using mediation is ideally suited to Bush and Folger’s (1994) social justice story as it occurs between ‘powerful’ employers and ‘powerless’ employees. He points out that there is underlying inequality of power in disputes between the powerful and the powerless that is masked by using ‘neutral’ conflict resolution processes. In this way ‘neutral’ conflict resolution processes are used as a tool to reinforce the status quo and protect the interests of the powerful. The response to this from a critical theorist perspective has been a call for conflict resolution in cases where there is a power imbalance to focus on protecting the interests of the less powerful party (Hansen, 2008).

One wonders why an oppressive employer would ever agree to mediation in dealing with an employment issue when the mediator is openly sympathetic to the employee's position. Reasons they may have for doing this are firstly that they may be aware of the injustice that exists and want to address it (Bush & Folger, 1994). Secondly the oppressor may be compelled to come, either by higher authority or by the oppressed themselves due to their using shame or other direct action to force them to act (King, 1992). Finally the outcomes from this type of mediation tend to be more durable and sustainable. This is because outcomes that give the oppressed more power, reduce social inequities and eliminate structural oppression are seen as just and thus are more respected (Galtung, 2000). Apart from being compelled to come to mediation it is still hard to imagine an employer willingly attending a mediation where the mediator is openly sympathetic to the employees position.

### **Concluding comments**

According to Lulofs and Cahn (2000) mediation is attractive because it can potentially deliver win-win outcomes and has a high success rate. However both of these attributes are now facing serious challenges from research. It has been found by Pruitt et al. (1993) that mediation may not actually deliver true win-win outcomes, meaning that the true success rate of mediation may not be high. A compelling explanation for this is the negotiators dilemma, which explains how it is safer for parties in a collaborative negotiation to behave competitively than to behave collaboratively (Axelrod, 1984). Furthermore mediation has a number of problematic aspects. These are that mediator neutrality may be impossible to achieve, the powerless are disadvantaged by its approach to neutrality, there may be advantages for a participant in speaking first and it favours the more experienced and articulate. These factors mean that mediation tends to reinforce the dominant paradigm and in this respect is a tool for the powerful to suppress the powerless.

It would be reasonable to dismiss mediation as a tool used by the powerful to disempower the powerless from the research outlined above. However Bush and Folger (1994) contend it is too early to label it as just a tool of control. They point out that mediation is still evolving and covers many broad approaches . This means that potentially mediation can evolve into a form that does not have the weaknesses identified in the last paragraphs. For example it is possible



that Bush and Folger's (1994) social justice story may evolve into a useful method for dealing with employment disputes.

The negotiators dilemma means mediation is unlikely to consistently deliver true win-win outcomes. However as the alternative is for conflict to continue to be dealt with so win-lose outcomes are predominant the reasons for continuing to look for a working system that delivers win-win outcomes are compelling. For these reasons it is best that the conflict industry develop an increased awareness of the influence of power in mediation and look at mediation as a work in progress. As mediation is still developing it is best it be given a broad definition and then the various models be allowed to evolve. This process may reveal approaches that deal with many of the issues raised by the critics (Bush & Folger, 1994). Hopefully an approach will emerge that can minimise the negotiators dilemma.

Having now deconstructed both ADR and mediation it is appropriate to look at an approach that potentially will reduce the volume of destructive workplace conflict. That approach is training and significant research supports it as an effective means of reducing levels of destructive conflict.

## **Section 2.9: Training**

The CPP Global Human Capital Report (2008) found that "Training is the biggest driver for high-quality outcomes from conflict" (CPP Global Human Capital Report, 2008 p.3). In terms of the cliff top analogy referred to earlier in this literature review training is a cliff top approach as it occurs before conflict has become destructive. Thus it is potentially superior to ADR based workplace conflict management systems focused on bottom of the cliff remedies. This is because training can potentially reduce the numbers of conflicts falling off the cliff.

The CPP Global Human Capital Report (2008) found that training staff in conflict management was highly effective. According to CPP 95% of the participants to their questionnaire who had received training agreed that the training they had received had helped them in some way. Furthermore a staggering 58% of those participants that received training said they now looked for win-win outcomes from conflict. This indicates that training might be highly effective in changing staff attitudes about conflict.

However despite the proven effectiveness of training most staff are not trained in conflict resolution. The CPP Global Human Capital Report (2008) showed that 56% of participants had received no training in conflict resolution at all. Of the 44% of the survey that had received training, 13% had attended an external course, 12% had received some training in this area as part of leadership development and the rest relied on informal peer advice. The report said that 7% of those surveyed had sought help from the Internet on how to manage conflict. The report speculated that this was done in “desperation” at the lack of training that staff had received (CPP Global Human Capital Report, 2008, p.14). This general lack of training was described as “lamentable” (CPP Global Human Capital Report, 2008, p.15).

### **The case for training**

Avruch (2009) says training should be used when there is a general belief in the importance of having certain knowledge and it is important that this knowledge is passed on to a new group. This appears to accurately describe the situation where an organisation has staff that have not received training in conflict resolution. He says training is also appropriate when a new approach to using knowledge and skills is required. This means even previously trained practitioners need to be retrained. Thus training in conflict resolution, which is experiencing a period of evolution and change, should be an ongoing process in organisations. Avruch (2009) says these two scenarios are related through the concept of confidence. With new training there needs to be confidence that the training will be effective and with retraining there needs to be confidence that the new approach is better than the one it is replacing.

Avruch (2009) places training on a continuum which also involves the education system. For example in Norway conflict resolution is now taught in schools as part of the standard curriculum. According to Johannessen (2007) this approach is working. “After a long period in which bullying in schools has increased, the latest surveys show that the trend has turned. The prevalence of bullying is reduced, especially among boys.”(Johannessen, 2007, p.99). This proves that training in conflict resolution can deliver measurable results.

## **Concluding comments**

Training staff in conflict resolution is potentially superior to all forms of mediation, arbitration, adjudication and negotiation with respect to its ability to reduce levels of destructive workplace conflict. However it is rarely used by organisations and perhaps this point highlights the depth of confusion that exists about how to deal with destructive workplace conflict.

Earlier in this thesis an analogy was made with conflict occurring at the top of a cliff and destructive conflict falling off the cliff. ADR techniques that include negotiation, mediation, arbitration and adjudication in this analogy are a hospital that operates at the bottom of the cliff. No matter how well the hospital operates it will not reduce the numbers of conflicts becoming destructive and falling off the cliff and this is what the research has revealed. Research has been presented in this section showing that despite ADR, in the US, where ADR based systems of conflict management enjoy strong support, levels of destructive conflict are continuing to rise (Masters & Allbright, 2002). Furthermore research has also been presented showing that mediation in its current form is a problematic ADR that may not deliver the win-win outcomes and high success rates its proponents claim. To reduce the numbers of conflicts falling off the cliff, approaches like training, that operate as a fence at the top of the cliff, are clearly where future research on workplace conflict needs to be focused.

## **Section 2.10: Conclusion**

This literature review began with a discussion of dualism and power as they are key concepts that need to be understood in order to appreciate the nuances of workplace conflict. Accordingly it makes sense to conclude this literature review by summarising the sections on dualism and power and then considering the conclusions arrived at in the literature review from these perspectives.

Dualism is a view that everything can be divided into polar opposites (Del Collins, 2005). According to Einstein the key delusion that dualism is based on is the deluded notion of self and other and this is the cause of the competitive behaviour that results in so much human suffering. For example the dualistic notion of self and other dictates that if there is winner

there must be a loser and thus from a dualistic perspective, conflict resolution, where both sides win, is not possible. Non-dualistic approaches, that allow win-win outcomes, are required for conflict resolution to occur.

Power is a neutral element that can either be used constructively or destructively. Power is dependent on endorsement by those it was being used over for it to be effective (Foucault, 1994). Those holding power protect it through keeping it unrecognized. "If weaker parties cannot see the power, or if they do not understand how it works, they can do nothing to upset the present balance" (Folger et al. 2005, p.136). Kolb (2008) identified one way this occurs when she identified how organizations try to individualize conflicts in order to safeguard existing power systems. Foucault (1994) identified another way when he described how the powerful control discourse through controlling the media. Evidence of the effectiveness of these efforts is that many conflict theorists have overlooked that systemic power factors may be involved in conflict.

While power is neutral, dualism is inherently destructive. This literature review contends that a combination of dualistic mindsets and power results in power becoming destructive. This is because when conflict is combined with competitive (dualistic) approaches to resolution it becomes escalated and destructive (Wertheim et al. 1998). This means heavily escalated destructive conflict can be considered a consequence of dualistic thinking.

When one considers what this literature review has revealed about conflict resolution it is clear that the entire area is full of seemingly irrational thinking. The following are examples of this:

- Conflict is viewed negatively by the general public although it is clearly a natural and essential aspect of life.
- Conflict industry professionals are looking for ways to resolve conflict so there are win-win outcomes once it has become escalated despite the evidence that at this point it is too late.
- Many conflict theorists do not acknowledge systemic power factors have a role in conflict despite the evidence that they do.
- Many conflict theorists do not consider personality as an important factor in conflict. This is in contradiction of quantitative research showing personality clashes are the main form of workplace conflict.

- ADR has gained broad acceptance as the solution to workplace conflict for organisations despite the research showing that it is ineffective and has failed to stem increasing levels of destructive workplace conflict.
- Win-win outcomes are touted as the answer to the ‘problem’ of conflict even though the negotiators’ dilemma means it is unrealistic to expect parties to behave collaboratively.
- Mediator neutrality is very difficult to achieve and the powerless are often disadvantaged by mediation’s approach to neutrality. This means mediation tends to reinforce the dominant paradigm and in this respect is a tool of the powerful.
- When evidence appears that training is effective at reducing levels of destructive conflict in organisations it is largely ignored.

Looked at collectively, the numerous problematic aspects of how conflict resolution has evolved raise an issue. This is why has conflict resolution evolved in such an unreflected way? There seem to be two possible answers. One is that the area of conflict resolution has naturally evolved in this way and the other is that this pattern points to outside forces influencing the development of conflict resolution.

Earlier in this thesis it was shown that the powerful can use their power to make sure the disempowered ‘do not understand how it works’ and start to challenge power. Foucault (1994) identified one way this occurs when he described how the powerful control discourse through controlling the media. Freire (1997) pointed out that controlling discourse is actually a form of violence against the disempowered that must be overcome if there is to be a just society. Freire (1997) identified teaching critical thinking as the best way to protect the interests of the disempowered. This implies that the powerful will use their power to ensure the powerless do not get taught how to think critically. As training in conflict resolution will develop critical thinking skills from this perspective it should be discouraged as seems to have happened.

From a dualistic power perspective scientific exploration of conflict resolution represents a threat to the powerful as it could become another area where the role of power is exposed and potentially changed by science. From this perspective it makes sense that the powerful use their control of the media to control discourse to confuse this issue as this enables the powerful to protect their power. This provides an explanation for conflict being perceived negatively, for why many theorists have not acknowledged that systemic factors can cause

conflict and for why theorists are futilely looking for answers at the bottom of the cliff. This is that if the systemic factors involved in workplace conflict were recognised it could potentially threaten the position of the powerful and so effort should be made to confuse this issue.

From this perspective ADR based workplace conflict management systems are implemented out of a desire by employers for power over the processes and outcomes of workplace conflicts. This means that workplace conflict management systems are a means for the powerful to control the powerless. Given this conclusion it is to be expected that ADR techniques will receive broad support even though they are ineffective (as is the case). From a dualistic power perspective a seriously flawed approach like mediation should be supported as it supports the dominant paradigm and the positions of the powerful.

Because those holding power protect their positions and power by keeping their power unrecognized, the battle against dualism, if it is actually happening, is being fought out of sight. While the interests of the powerful and the fact that our language has many dualistic assumptions may be on one side of this battle, the forces on the other side include aspects of science and market forces. Science can threaten the unquestioning acceptance of duality by society and has already dispelled many dualistic beliefs. Market forces threaten the survival of organisations that exhibit overly dualistic cultures. It has been shown that levels of destructive workplace conflict are continuing to rise in the US despite widespread implementation of ADR based workplace conflict systems. It has also been shown that the costs of this conflict can be more than \$20,000 per employee per annum in organizations that have problem levels of conflict.

According to the CPP Global Human Capital Report (2008) training is the single most important activity that organisations wanting to reduce levels of destructive workplace conflict can engage in. Unfortunately evidence from both the CPP Global Human Capital Report (2008) and Harris and Crothers (2010) shows that most employees receive no training in conflict management. From a dualistic power perspective the explanation for this is that as training is likely to involve teaching critical thinking it should be discouraged.

Albert Einstein (Darling, 1996) identifies that dualism exists because of human delusion and suggests that dualism can be overcome through compassion, which implies a shift in consciousness. It is hoped that such a shift occurs. If dualism is defeated the area of

destructive workplace conflict will likely be changed for the better. However as this has never happened in history it is unlikely that it will occur in the future and this means the likelihood is that levels of workplace conflict will continue to rise. Scimecca (1993) warns that conflict resolution risks becoming a tool by which the powerful could further disempower the powerless unless it is backed by a sound theory. Unfortunately this literature review has shown the attempts to develop a political theory of conflict resolution have failed and Scimecca's fears appear to have been well founded. It should be stressed that there is no clear evidence that the influence of the powerful is the reason for the apparent irrationalities occurring within conflict resolution. However there is enough circumstantial evidence to theorise that this is the case.

What the literature has revealed about workplace conflict is that by itself it is not a problem. It becomes a problem when there are excessive levels of destructive conflict in an organisation. With this in mind it is now time to consider the research aspect of this thesis.

## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

### **Background**

I became interested in the area of workplace conflict when I worked as marketing manager for a finance company where there was constant tension and conflict between staff. It seemed to me that this was causing a lot of unhappiness, stress and expense and that it should have been possible to do something about this situation. However my role meant I was constantly travelling and had no time available to study this area.

The collapse of the finance industry led me to conclude that the investment sector was changing fundamentally and the role I had specialised in for most of my career was likely to disappear. This meant that I needed to gain new skills in order to have a meaningful role in the future and this led me to explore studying conflict resolution. I wanted to find out what caused destructive workplace conflict and what could be done to remedy the situation. My experience in the workplace and the feedback I had received from friends in other organisations led me to believe that workplace conflict was a widespread problem in New Zealand. This meant that potentially there was an interesting role for me in this area if I developed the appropriate skills. The AUT Masters programme in Conflict Resolution was the only course I could find in Auckland that seemed to offer the answers I was looking for and this is why I enrolled. While I found the course content interesting it did not provide me with the answers I was looking for regarding workplace conflict.

When I had to choose a topic for my thesis I knew I wanted to look at workplace conflict in order to satisfy my interest in this area. I decided to undertake qualitative research within the social constructionist paradigm and to utilise a grounded theory methodology. Grounded theory appealed as Masters and Albright (2002) identify that despite the efforts of workplace conflict professionals in America levels of workplace conflict are increasing. This indicates there may be a problem with the theory of workplace conflict. According to Burck (2005) grounded theory is particularly well suited to situations where an area may be under theorised.



### **Section 3.1: Social constructionism**

According to the Penguin Dictionary of Psychology (2001) social constructionists argue that there is no such thing as an objective reality. They maintain that all knowledge is derived from the mental constructions of the members of a social system. Burr (1998, p.119) explains why social constructionists take this position:

Social constructionism argues that our understanding of the world and each other is socially constructed through our interactions with each other, especially in our use of language and that our thinking rests on the use of concepts and assumptions which are embedded in our language.

This line of thinking links language to what we perceive as reality. Weedon (1997, p.21) builds on this idea and explains how the use of language means that our ideas of ourselves mean that our subjectivity is socially constructed:

Language is the place where actual and possible forms of social organisation and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested. Yet it is also the place where our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity, is constructed. The assumption that subjectivity is constructed implies that it is not innate, not genetically determined but socially produced.

Burr (2003) claims there is no single all encompassing definition of social constructionism. However she says all social constructionist approaches have at their foundation one or more of the following key assumptions:

1-Social constructionism takes a critical view of accepted knowledge and contends that there is no objective reality for an observer. Reality is heavily influenced by language and presents itself through the personal experiences of the observer.

2- Historical and cultural specificity. The ways we classify things are historically and culturally specific. These categories develop through the social interactions between people at a particular time and in a particular place. Categories of understanding, therefore, are influenced by situational factors.

3- Knowledge is sustained by social process. How reality is perceived at a given point in time is determined by the conventions of communication in force at that time.

4- Reality is socially constructed by interconnected patterns of communication behaviour. Within a society reality is defined by complex patterns of ongoing actions. Social constructionism posits that knowledge and social action are connected.

As it challenges accepted knowledge, social constructionism has aspects consistent with the approaches identified by Del Collins in her comments on how science threatens dualism. For example Burr (2003) gives gender as an example of an aspect of life that is socially constructed, the same subject that was used in the literature review as an example of dualistic thinking. However social constructionism has not specifically identified dualistic thinking as something that it opposes. However as social constructionism takes a critical view of taken for granted knowledge it seems only a question of time before social constructionists embrace the idea of opposing dualistic thinking.

In identifying how reality is perceived as dependent on communication behaviour, social constructionism implicitly identifies that those that control language can create reality. In this respect social constructionism exposes the power of those controlling the media. It can therefore be expected that the subtle forces of power will be supporting approaches that are in opposition to social constructionism.

### **Features of social constructionism**

Burr (2003, p.5) claims that social constructionism is anti- essentialist:

Since the social world, including ourselves as people, is the product of social processes, it follows that there cannot be any given, determined nature to the world or people. There are no essences inside things or people that make them what they are.

She claims this aspect of social constructionism is widely misunderstood as many people believe social constructionism can be linked to nurture in the nature versus nurture debate. Burr (2003) says this understanding is actually essentialist and while it is consistent with the view taken in some kinds of traditional psychology it cannot be called social constructionist. Nightingale and Cromby (1999) describe this dynamic slightly differently to Burr (2003), calling it a relativist epistemology. They say that since social constructionists contend we can only conceive of reality using language, then language creates our relative reality and true reality is inaccessible. This means we need not consider true reality.

Realism is the doctrine that an external world exists independently of our representations of it. Representations include perceptions, thoughts, language, beliefs

and desires, as well as artefacts such as pictures and maps, and so include all the ways in which we could or do know and experience the world and ourselves. Relativism repudiates this doctrine, arguing that since any such external world is inaccessible to us in both principle and practice, it need not be postulated or considered (Nightingale & Cromby, 1999, p. 6).

This means language is reality as far as humans are concerned as they cannot conceive of reality except through language:

Every thing we think of or talk about, including our identities, our selves, is constructed through language, manufactured out of discourses. Nothing has any essential independent existence outside of language (Burr, 2003, p.105).

While it would be easy to conclude from this comment that social constructionists see language as the only reality Edley (2001) says this is not the case. He explains that real phenomena are only understood through concepts that are expressed in language and in this sense their reality is socially constructed. Thus real phenomena are not socially constructed but the way we think and speak about them is socially constructed.

The social constructionist approach is consistent with the approach taken in the literature review which looked at conflict from the perspectives of power and dualism. Furthermore I found it difficult to disagree with the social constructionist perspective on essentialism. This meant social constructionism was the appropriate paradigm to use with this research.

### **Section 3.2: Grounded theory**

Grounded theory was developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and has become by far the most popular method for analysing qualitative data (Bryman, 2004). According to Neuman (1997) the purpose of grounded theory is to develop a theory that is based on the actual data and involves the researcher using micro level events as the basis for a macro level explanation. Grounded theory is defined as “theory that was derived from data, systematically gathered and analysed through the research process. In this method data collection, analysis and eventual theory stand in close relationship to one another” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998,

p.12). They say that data can come from interviews, observations or texts and often involve various combinations of these.

According to Bryman (2004) there are two core features of grounded theory. Firstly it looks to develop theory from data with no prior theoretical preconceptions (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Secondly the grounded theory process is iterative, meaning it is evolutionary, and theories are continually revised as new data is obtained.

### **Strengths and weaknesses of grounded theory**

According to Neuman (1997) one of the main attractions of grounded theory is that it shares a number of goals with positivist theory and is therefore relatively compatible with it. These shared goals are that it looks to develop a theory based on the evidence the research uncovers, that it is precise and rigorous and that it is capable of being replicated.

Crano and Brewer (2002) claim the major weakness with grounded theory is that it is based on developing initial ideas and then having them influenced by a sequential flow of new data. They say that the initial ideas bias the results. Rosenthal, Persinger, Vikan-Kline and Fode (1963) performed experiments which demonstrated that when researchers had their initial ideas either confirmed or disconfirmed early in the research process subsequent ideas reflected the early confirmation or disconfirmation. Crano and Brewer (2002) explain the way to remove this bias is to wait until all the data is collected before commencing analysis and point out that this approach contradicts grounded theory's requirement to develop ideas and allow them to be influenced by new data.

Other criticisms of grounded theory are that according to Bryman (2004) it is doubtful whether grounded theory analysis always results in theory being developed. He also says that there are not clear lines between some component parts of grounded theory such as 'concepts' and 'categories' and that it is unrealistic to expect that researchers can actually shut out their own prior experience and beliefs when looking at data.

It also appears that Glaser and Strauss (1967) may have been idealistic rather than realistic in arguing that researchers should try to have no prior knowledge of the area they are studying. In the academic world researchers tend to specialise in a particular area. Yet the grounded

theory thinking that researchers should try to have no prior knowledge suggests an approach that is almost the opposite of how most academic research occurs. Furthermore researchers, when they design questions to ask in interviews, need a level of understanding of a subject in order to create meaningful questions. This probably requires they either have expertise in an area or review the literature before formulating questions. For these reasons the view that researchers should try to have no prior knowledge seems unrealistic.

In this research the areas that were explored in the interviews were the areas that emerged from the literature review. This meant that the questions in this research were grounded in the literature. This situation is likely to occur in most research projects where the researchers have prior expertise.

Glaser and Strauss eventually disagreed and published conflicting views about this point. Glaser (1978) encourages the researcher to take the approach of having little prior knowledge of the subject while Strauss and Corbin (1990) were of the view that the researcher will have prior knowledge and should not try to forget this. Charmaz (1995) and Henwood and Pigeon (1996) took this position even further, arguing that it was impossible for researchers to have no prior hypotheses.

Glaser (2004) revisited this issue in 2004 and took a more moderate position. He explained the danger he perceived in having conducted a detailed literature review prior to conducting the interviews. This is that the results from the literature review can lead to violation of the basic requirement of grounded theory that theory emerges from the data. This explanation by Glaser (2004) means that it is violating the requirement that theory emerge from the data that is the danger. Conducting a literature review prior to the interviews is therefore only problematic if it leads to theory that is not based in the data. Presumably this means if there is a literature review conducted prior to interviews but the grounded theory that emerges subsequently has no relationship to the literature then Glaser would be satisfied that no violation of the core principle of grounded theory had occurred. This is what occurred with this research as the theory that emerged from the interviews was unrelated to almost all the literature on conflict.

### **Section 3.3: Research objective**

The research objective was to develop a workplace conflict resolution theory that could be applied to situations where problem levels of workplace conflict were occurring. This was to be done by applying a grounded theory approach to examining interviews that explored the experiences and practice theories of conflict professionals and managers who deal with workplace conflict.

### **Section 3.4: Participant selection**

Participants were identified using a combination of purposive and snowball sampling (Babbie, 2007). Identifying appropriate subjects to interview was problematic as at the outset of this thesis I planned to interview conflict industry professionals for their views as to what could be done about workplace conflict. However Masters and Albright (2002) claim that in America, where alternative dispute resolution (ADR) has been most widely adopted, it has failed to stem increasing levels of destructive conflicts within organisations. According to Mackie (1991) ADR includes all the methods for resolving conflict. This meant that conflict industry professionals may not be appropriate interviewees for questions on how to reduce levels of destructive conflict within organisations. For this reason it was decided to interview a combination of business and conflict professionals. Accordingly the subjects' backgrounds included managers who have a reputation for creating harmonious workplaces, managers who work or worked for organisations that had a good reputation for the way they treated staff, lawyers, mediators, human resources professionals, workplace conflict professionals, workplace trainers and psychologists. Through my extensive network of business contacts, built up over a 20 year career in financial services, I was able to identify a number of organisations and managers with good reputations when it came to creating harmonious workplaces and treating staff well. These contacts were typically business development and marketing managers who had worked for a number of financial services organisations and so were able to identify from personal experience which organisations were appropriate for me to contact.

Potential participants were all phoned to ask whether they would be prepared to participate. During this phone call the researcher explained what the research was about, that the research

was part of a requirement for a Masters degree at AUT and that the interviews should take approximately one hour. In every case the potential participant agreed to be interviewed during this phone call and a time was set for the interview to take place in the participant's workplace.

### **Section 3.5: Data collection**

It was decided to collect qualitative interview data for this research project using semi-structured interviews. In comparison to the alternative approaches of using structured or unstructured interviewing, semi-structured interviewing features both a degree of structure and the flexibility to allow further exploration of topics that arise during the interview that may be of interest to the researcher (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Furthermore semi-structured interviewing means that key interview questions can be consistently asked and this means that responses can be compared and this helps with data analysis (Patton, 2002).

According to Patton (2002) a weakness with semi-structured interviewing is that using standardised wordings with questions may limit the naturalness of the answers. Patton identifies (2002) a potential problem area as the interviews all followed the same format and began with the question about how to define conflict. However in every case the interviews quickly became quite intense. It was clear that the participants were all prepared to openly and freely contribute their views on workplace conflict. The freedom to explore issues that the semi-structured format allows was very beneficial. It meant that the interviews could flow a little like an everyday conversation and this resulted in a level of intensity in the interviews that was notable. As the interviewer the naturalness of the interviews did not appear to be compromised through using semi-structured interviewing. The feedback I received, at the end of each interview, was that the participants had enjoyed the experience and would be prepared to repeat the process. This occurred with every interview.

A further potential weakness with using semi-structured interviews is that the process can be very time consuming for the researcher (Robson, 1993). This was a fair criticism in this project as the participants were all busy professionals and needed to be visited to conduct the interviews. However the quality of the data obtained and the fact that I had the time available

to use this methodology meant that this weakness was not an obstacle in this particular research project.

### **Section 3.6: The interviews**

Semi-structured interviews took place between mid January and mid March of 2010. 14 interviews were conducted using a semi-structured format. The interviews occurred in the workplaces of the participants as this was convenient for them and an environment in which they felt comfortable. At the start of each interview a consent form was given to the participant and once it had been read and signed the interview commenced. This was a slightly awkward aspect to the interviews as there is a tension that occurs when you ask someone to sign a written document when you do not know them very well. Furthermore at this point the researcher dealt with the issue of confidentiality, explaining to the participants how their comments would remain confidential and this topic enhanced the tension that existed with the appearance of the consent form. However with subsequent small talk this tension soon evaporated.

The interviews generally lasted a little over an hour and were comprised of 14 core questions (see Appendix 1). These questions explored the participants' views on how to define conflict, win-win outcomes, conflict resolution processes, power, what factors affected levels of destructive conflict, harmonious workplaces, gender, culture, workplace conflict management systems and training. The themes explored by the interviews were closely related to the themes that emerged from the literature review, as I found that without completing the literature review I was unable to design questions that were relevant to what was in the literature. This led me to opt for the Strauss and Corbin (1990) version of grounded theory.

All the interviews were recorded using a non-digital tape recorder. This meant that there were delays when one side of a tape finished and needed to be changed. While the researcher was aware that this could be a source of irritation for the participants, the interviews had all reached the point where the participants were fully engaged in the interview when the tapes needed to be changed and this probably explains why the changing of tapes did not appear to be problematic during the interviews. During all the interviews notes were taken, although the interviewer tried to keep these to a minimum. The reason for this was a desire to maintain



eye contact with the candidates during the interviews as this made the interviews feel more natural. The researcher noticed that the intensity of the interview appeared to drop when eye contact was not regularly maintained.

Typically the interviews began with a coffee and a discussion of what the interview was about and why I was doing this research. Then the consent form was signed, it was explained that if the participant needed counselling following the interview then AUT had counsellors available and the tape recorder was tested and then turned on. The interviews began with a question about how conflict should be defined (see Appendix 1). Checking the participants' understanding of what conflict was created a context that helped me better understand subsequent comments they made about conflict and so was a natural starting point. It is also a relatively neutral topic, unlikely to generate a great deal of passion and so was a good starting point in this respect as well. As the questions moved into the participant's experiences of conflict the intensity of the interview rose and at this point my role became to maintain the flow through listening carefully and asking relevant additional questions when areas arose that I believed were worth exploring.

### **Section 3.7: Data analysis**

The interviews were all transcribed by a professional transcriber. As the thesis supervisor knew and had used a good transcriber there was no difficulty in identifying someone suitable. As there was too much background noise with one of the interviews it was not possible for it to be transcribed and so 13 interviews were transcribed. The interviews were coded and analysed using a grounded theory approach. There is debate as to how many different types of coding should occur with a grounded theory approach. Bryman (2004) identifies three types of coding: open, axial and selective. However Charmaz (2004) and Glaser (2004) only identify two; open or initial coding and selective or focused coding. As this research followed the ideas of Glaser, two types of coding, open and selective were used in this research.

Glaser (2004) describes the grounded theory process as beginning with open coding. This involves a line by line analysis of the data. He recommends looking at the data from every possible angle in order to identify what it means. He says researchers should constantly question what the data means and how it should be grouped and labelled during open coding.

Glaser (2004) says the process of open coding eventually identifies the core variable and that once this has been identified the second stage of the grounded theory analysis can begin.

This second stage is selective coding and involves refining and focusing the research on the data that is relevant to the core variable. The process of open coding identified ten themes and the core variable took months to emerge. However it did occur as Glaser (2004) said it would. This led to a grounded theory being identified.

Braun and Clarke (2006) warn that during selective coding it is easy for a mismatch to occur between the data and the analysis. For this reason the data was carefully analysed again and again for consistency. For example the conflict resolution literature reviewed did not mention systemic factors could be important sources of workplace conflict. When a respondent identified that workplace conflict often had systemic causes it was inconsistent with the conflict literature. This led to a focused analysis of the texts to see whether there had been references to systemic conflict made through both direct as well as indirect comments in the interviews.

### **Section 3.8: Data reliability**

The reliability and trustworthiness of data gathered during a research project is obviously of great importance. Robson (1993) cites Lincoln and Guba (1985) who proposed using credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability as criteria to test the trustworthiness of qualitative research. Credibility is a measure of whether the research findings are a valid construction of reality (Robson, 1993). He says this is often a problem issue with qualitative research. Taylor and Bogden (1998) recommend using triangulation to check credibility. This means the researcher should compare multiple sources of data with the interviews. This is what occurred in this research project. As the participants came from a variety of backgrounds triangulation was possible in the interview process. However the main source of triangulation was the extensive literature review. Effort was also made to interview the most credible participants possible. This led, for example, to a High Court judge becoming one of the participants.

Transferability refers to the ability of the research to be replicated beyond the specific research context and is often viewed as impossible with qualitative research (Bryman & Bell,

2007). As the participants in this project had, in some cases, relatively unique backgrounds, it is unlikely that the data that emerged from their interviews could be exactly replicated. In this respect the criticism identified by Bryman and Bell (2007) can be levelled at this research. However if participants who were CEOs of organisations with a collaborative culture and a good reputation for workplace harmony were interviewed then I would expect that the results would be consistent with what occurred in this research. However it is difficult to address this issue with confidence.

Dependability deals with the participants' views on whether the data has been reliably interpreted (Ghauri & Gronhaug, 2005). Lincoln and Guba (1985) believe that demonstrating credibility is sufficient to satisfy the issue of dependability. Dependability by itself is difficult to establish and so it is helpful to use credibility as a method to satisfy dependability.

Confirmability is defined by Ghauri and Gronhaug (2005) as dealing with the danger that the analysis distorts the data and is made up by the researcher. The way that this issue was dealt with was through using a large number of direct quotes, thereby letting the words of the participants answer the challenge of confirmability.

### **Section 3.9: Problematic areas**

#### **Combining grounded theory and social constructionism**

It was problematic trying to reconcile a grounded theory approach with a social constructionist paradigm as occurred in this research. Grounded theory requires that the words used by the participants are the source of the theory. As all of the literature on workplace conflict that was reviewed seemed to be based on essentialist assumptions it meant that the research questions asked, which explored the literature review, also had essentialist assumptions behind them. As the questions had essentialist assumptions behind them and there are essentialist assumptions prevalent in much of the language associated with conflict resolution the answers the participants gave were also largely based on essentialist assumptions.

This cannot be reconciled with the anti-essentialist position of social constructionism. However the strength of the social constructionist position is such that it is difficult to deny it.

For these reasons a social constructionist perspective is given for each of the themes identified and for the conclusion. This is a little cumbersome but allows the results to remain consistent with grounded theory and the perspective offered by social constructionism to also be considered. Giving two perspectives may also lead to a deeper understanding of the results.

### **The key power individual in the organisation**

The participants' answers often referred to the key individual holding power in the organisation. However there was variance as to what title this person had. This person was variously referred to as the boss, the managing director, the head, the chief executive officer (CEO), the manager and the owner. This variance is potentially confusing. As in the vast majority of responses the CEO was identified as the sole key power figure, the title CEO is used in the remainder of this thesis to represent the key power figure in an organisation. When another title is used in the quotes or there are subtle aspects of meaning that mean the title CEO is not fully representative of what is being communicated then other titles are used. In situations where more than one key power figure was identified the actual title used by the participants is also retained.

### **Personality**

In the literature review one of the aspects of diversity that was considered was personality. In the discussion of personality in the literature review the following broad definition of personality from Robbins et al. (2008, p.104) was given: "The sum total of ways in which an individual reacts and interacts with others". This definition is sufficiently broad that when it comes to verbal interaction between people, personality and behaviour are relatively synonymous.

In the interviews the participants gave answers describing both personality types and personal qualities using concepts such as ethics, values, and speaking and acting consistently. The problem this created was how to classify these. Were they behaviours or aspects of personality?

If behaviour was exclusively used then it would be difficult to compare the literature reviews discussion of personality with actions described as behaviours in the discussion section of the results. The concept of personality is also problematic as social constructionism denies that personality exists (Burr, 2003). Furthermore even if it does exist the Penguin Dictionary of Psychology (2001) mentions personality has at least 50 definitions. This means is not possible to come up with a compromise solution as to how to label behaviour that is consistent with all the different definitions of and positions regarding *personality*. In order to create relative clarity both the words *personality* and *behaviour* are used and the definition of personality provided by Robbins et al (2008) has been adopted.

## **Chapter Four: Results and discussion**

The questions in the semi-structured interviews were designed to explore the participants views on the broad areas and themes identified in the literature review. Following transcription a lengthy process of coding and reflection occurred. The process of open coding was used to identify the key themes that emerged from the interviews. The themes identified through using open coding are:

### **Theme 1: A lack of consensus in defining conflict**

The literature identified that there was a great deal of confusion as to how conflict should be defined and this was reflected in the responses. Two participants identified conflict as involving opposing views. Most other participants mentioned conflict as occurring when the parties see things differently and disagree. Only one of the participants identified conflict as existing when one of the parties felt uncomfortable.

Seven of the participants identified conflict as a disagreement between two or more people. This was explained by three participants as involving negative emotions including fear, lack of emotional control, competitive behaviour and feeling uncomfortable. This perspective implied that conflict was negative and a sign that things were somehow dysfunctional. Participant F, a mediator, commented on how this perception was a mistaken one. She said that the word conflict presumes negativity but “We’re beginning to see conflict as just a normal natural part of the way things are”. She advocated replacing the word conflict with one that did not have negative undertones. Participant A, a CEO, expanded on this point “The problem I’ve got is that the word conflict, people see that as confrontation, it’s not. It’s just normal, daily interplay between human beings”. Five of the participants agreed with this view that conflict was normal. Participant G explained how it was a part of both internal and external life “Conflict is all around us, internally, externally, everywhere”.

Three participants went further, participant A, a CEO, claiming:

What you are really talking about is how human beings get along with each other and the answer is we rub along. It’s only through the conflict of ideas that we get advancement. It is only through the conflict of ideas that we get clarity of thought.

Participant K pointed out that “Sometimes conflict is good” and Participant D said:

There is always going to be conflict. You have new people coming in, you have people who have been there for a while, changes in circumstances, you’ve got new roles, there’s an element of conflict that should be there. Where you’ve got a lot of energy and you’ve got a lot of drive you by default get conflict. People who are very driven often drive over the top of other people who aren’t.

## **Discussion**

The two participants who thought that the parties’ views must be opposite for there to be conflict, demonstrated dualistic thinking. This is because this position is overly simplistic. Conflict can occur if there are differing views and this does not necessarily mean the views are opposites. Arguing that conflict exists when there are differing views is more differentiated.

The clear majority supported the definition of conflict as existing when two parties disagree. This meant that a clear majority supported a position that enjoys support from much of the literature (Lulofs & Cahn, 2000; Cahn & Abigail, 2007) but which was not the definition that the literature review identified as being the strongest, that is that conflict exists when it is felt by one of the parties.

A grounded theory approach requires that the results form the basis of the theory and so even though the researcher still believes the arguments in favour of defining conflict as existing when one party feels disagreement are compelling, it is clear that the majority of participants disagreed with this definition and their views are what matters.

That some of the participants viewed conflict as negative while others made the effort to explain that conflict was a normal and natural aspect of life was also significant. This is because the literature review identified how there is a general misperception of conflict as being purely negative (see Brandon & Robertson, 2007). The participants’ responses indicated that the literature was correct and that there is a perception that conflict is purely negative. However the responses also indicated that not only researchers but some conflict professionals and managers viewed conflict as a normal part of life. That one of the participants said “sometimes conflict is good” was a clear sign that the idea that conflict is

purely negative is being challenged both by research and by some managers and conflict professionals.

Pruitt (2008) has a previously mentioned view that is consistent with the participants' responses. He views conflict as a normal part of organisational life. He also views conflict escalation as normal and points out that mild escalation can actually be beneficial as it identifies issues and motivates the parties involved to resolve them (Pruitt, 2008). What he sees as a problem is severe conflict escalation. This is because as it can disrupt an organisation from functioning and can become self fuelling. This differentiated position is consistent with the participants who believed that conflict was a normal part of life. It is also consistent with the views that conflict can be a problem. Pruitt's (2008) view that conflict is normal in organisations and only becomes a problem when it becomes severely escalated is consistent with the answers from the participants.

Social constructionism as it views discourse as the key would view conflict as being the result of incompatible discourses. However as social constructionism according to Burr (2003) views social research that tries to identify what is normal and what is not normal as tools of social control the social constructionist position does not try to identify whether conflict is normal.

## **Theme 2: The need for respect in the workplace**

The most strongly supported theme that emerged from the interviews was how critically important respect was. The issue of respect was repeatedly raised by most participants throughout the interviews. Management just listening to staff in a respectful way and implementing their recommendations was enough in some organisations to create a good work environment. Participant K described how a new CEO:

Came and picked up the Employee Opinion Survey and actually made all the changes that the people had asked for. He listened to the knowledge inside the organisation and grew it and it was a wonderful environment. He has since moved on and it has regressed.

Participant A described how the chairman of a large listed company in New Zealand had such a concern that management should listen to staff that at one stage he would dress in dirty



overalls and prowl the coffee rooms listening to what the staff on the ground were saying. He would then line up his managers and tell them the problems he had heard described that they needed to solve. He made all senior managers sign an undated letter of resignation before they were employed as a means of getting them to take his recommendations seriously “That’s how he used to operate but the company was totally harmonious”.

Participant K went even further as she identified management listening to staff gave a company a competitive advantage as well as creating workplace harmony “What makes this company successful is an open door policy where people can go in and talk to the senior managers and directors”.

Some participants believed it was also important that staff respected the CEO and said for this to happen it was crucial that the CEO spoke and acted consistently. Participants were asked in one question to describe the most harmonious workplace they had experienced. This left them with the opportunity to describe what factors they believed contributed to low levels of destructive conflict. There were only six participants that had experienced harmonious workplaces. Participant G described a harmonious workplace where the CEO was “A man who firmly believed you should do good and this gentleman walked what he talked. There was no conflict there at all”.

Other participants mentioned the importance of respect flowing in all directions. Participant M identified a harmonious workplace she had worked in where the CEO was clearly respected and listened to staff:

The boss was quick to make decisions and they were fair. She didn’t particularly seem to have favourites and she gave people space to say what they needed to say in meetings.

Participant G, a training manager, identified staff respecting each other as individuals as critical in order for there to be workplace harmony.

Participant D described the key to creating workplace harmony as:

I think what really drives that harmonious sort of culture is an underlying respect for everybody within the organisation and a value sharing, which is really driven by communication, open communication. So you treat people like everybody is the managing director, like they are entitled to know what is happening within the organisation. The other side is ‘walk the talk’. You will never have a harmonious

organisation where managers say ‘do this but do as I say not as I do’. So I think staff will follow and behave according to how they see the people leading, absolute honest truth.

Respect was also emphasised in the answers to the question about what causes systemic conflict. For example participant M identified disrespect as the main cause of systemic conflict when she said “Systems that cause conflict might be where decisions are made about people’s jobs with no consultation”. What could be more disrespectful to staff than this?

Participant G also believed disrespect was what caused systemic conflict, She described a situation where she was not treated with respect in an organisation she had worked for some years previously:

I worked in a merchant bank where the culture was appalling. I had a man, one of the owners, throw his keys at me and tell me to get his golf clubs out one day and he said, ‘you have touched a Mercedes before?’

She was still upset with the way she had been treated and thus the effects of disrespectful behaviour by management can be long lasting and may not always diminish with time.

While participants identified that respect was the key to creating harmonious workplaces, an emerging trend of disrespect in New Zealand was identified by participant G. She believed that this was a major and growing problem in New Zealand businesses “Somewhere along the line we’ve lost fundamental respect for each other”. She thought this problem was one of the biggest facing New Zealand society “It’s huge, it starts politically, it starts socially and it just feeds down.

## **Discussion**

Earlier in this thesis the dangers of overly simplistic, dualistic, either-or thinking were described (Del Collins, 2005). This led to the conclusion being reached in the literature review that staff feeling the need for dignity and respect were symptoms of the problem rather than the problem itself. The patterns of thinking by management that led to staff feeling the need for dignity and respect were identified in the literature review as the real

problem. Thus management being seen to occasionally act in ways that respect staff may not result in less destructive conflict.

On reflection the literature review implicitly described that what staff were looking for was also a pattern of respect rather than an occasional episode. It also appears that participants are describing patterns of respect in their answers as to what is required for there to be workplace harmony. This is because a random act of respect in the context of a pattern of disrespect would not be enough to change peoples' perception that they were not feeling respected. Looking for patterns of respect avoids the potential problem of there being an act of respect that is not representative of a general approach of disrespect. Thus the importance of patterns of respect is identified in this research.

One might assume that the influence of the CEO in an organisation may only play a role in organisations where the staff and the CEO work in the same location but not in large organisations where there are thousands of employees in different locations around the country. However the participants' responses indicate that the influence of the leader applies throughout organisations, irrespective of their size and number of offices. Participant A gave an example of a chairman creating harmony in a large organisation where there were thousands of employees and multiple locations. While this example showed that the influence of the leader can affect the entire organisation it was a problematic example as it involved using fear as a tool to get managers to listen to staff. Managers who have signed an undated letter of resignation can be expected to be fearful that if they do not do what the chairman requests their letter of resignation will be dated. It is also hard to imagine any organisation being totally harmonious as the participant described. That this approach resulted in a notable increase in workplace harmony seems more realistic.

The focus on respect in the responses partially validates the position of Randy Hodson (2001), who argued that worker dignity is the key to creating harmonious workplaces. As none of the participants in New Zealand mentioned dignity and almost all mentioned respect, from a New Zealand perspective perhaps Hodson (2001) should also have looked at respect as being an important factor in workplace conflict.

It was also notable that two participants identified the importance of management 'walking their talk'. Walking ones talk was explained by one of the participants as management not saying one thing to staff and doing something different. It is understandable that staff would

struggle to respect a manager that said one thing to staff and did not then act consistently with what they said.

From a social constructionist perspective the need for respect is the need for a discourse of respect in the workplace. An occasional respectful act is not a discourse as the disciplinary power of discourses has a long term impact on behaviour.

### **Theme 3: Power is a key aspect of workplace conflict**

Most respondents identified power as a critical aspect of workplace conflict. Participant G, a training manager said “It’s everything, it’s absolutely everything”. She described a situation where a CEO didn’t like that her manager took turns with her to make cups of tea and used his power to stop this occurring to demonstrate how power is a critical aspect of conflict. Other participants had a similar view of the importance of power. Participant H called it “massive” and participant M, a therapist, said “I think the issue of power affects every relationship in daily life. So I think power is a huge issue”. Participant D took a slightly more differentiated position on the issue of power as she linked it to knowledge:

I think that information of power is a dangerous thing. I think that keeping half the organisation in the dark means that you will not achieve anything. It gives people power over others. I think openness is really important as it diffuses the situation and takes that power away. I think it’s driven by the behaviour of the people at the top.

Participant K was very aware of the dangers of disrespectful use of power as destructive:

When you have a manager who is using power to lord it over his employees, what he tends to do is make people feel bad. Now often this is covert. It could be passive aggressiveness, but he’ll know their vulnerabilities and everyone has insecurities and feelings of inferiority and they have a bad day and everyone has a sense of incompetence. Everyone carries it in different ways and a power based manager will use that to control his staff and make them jump through hoops. It is ultimately negative.

Participant F had also experienced power being used disrespectfully by the CEO: She described a work situation where the CEO would have decided on a course of action but would call meetings to discuss what action to take:

When anyone expressed an opinion that was against what the CEO said, he would cut them down and explain why they were wrong. Everyone became convinced that there was no point in saying anything.

A number of participants explained how power could be used constructively or destructively. Participant G explained this as:

Power trips cause some of the biggest problems, they are so destructive. I think that power used in the wrong way is extremely disruptive but power, when it's backed up with really good self-confidence and self-esteem is constructive.

Two of the participants worked in organisations that had a good understanding of the dangers of destructive power. Participant C, a human resources manager of a company with an excellent reputation for its treatment of staff explained how that company approached power:

The power was not based at all on people's positions, like the operations manager would not have any more I guess perceived power than the mailroom assistant. Everybody had complete control over their roles and they were given the authority to manage their roles in the way they saw as effective. They could make decisions which most people at certain levels in organisations can't. They were encouraged to make those decisions. They were given guidance when they were new, instructed how they should do things until they were trained, but they were always given the authority from day one to make decisions about how they could make their jobs better.

She said that when people learned that the company took this approach many people wanted to come and work there. I was also able to interview the CEO of this organisation, participant D, and she explained the approach she took with power and how she downplayed the importance of her role "I have always sold my role to people as not more important than them, it's just different".

## **Discussion**

In the literature review the history of modern conflict resolution was traced back to Weber (1948). It was mentioned that Weber considered power was the most important aspect behind conflict, explaining how power is legitimized in society and claiming that conflict is actually derived from social power. Folger et al.(2005), Kolb (2008) and Hocker and Wilmot (1995)

also view power as of critical importance and describe it systemically. Furthermore it has already been mentioned that Jaffee (2008) claims organisational conflict has its origins in the industrial revolution, where workers began to resist and rebel against capitalist employers. Jaffee's (2008) comments identify that workplace conflict originated as a systemic form of conflict caused by the way employers used power.

In the discussion of power in the literature review a split was identified between conflict theorists who believe systemic power was a critical aspect of conflict (Folger et al. 2005; Kolb, 2008 and Hocker and Wilmot, 1995) and those that believed systemic power was of no importance in conflict (Burton, 1990; Lulofs & Cahn, 2000; Cahn & Abigail, 2007; Tillett & French, 2006 and Ellis & Anderson, 2005).

There was a consensus amongst respondents that power is a very important aspect of workplace conflict. Furthermore what the participants were describing when they gave examples of power causing conflict problems in the workplace was, in every case, systemic use of power. This meant the participants' views on the importance of power were consistent with those of the conflict theorists that identified power as a systemic issue that was of critical importance in conflict. As this research takes a grounded theory approach the participants' views are what matters. Accordingly power is clearly a systemic issue in workplace conflict.

This raises the issue of why so many conflict theorists have avoided considering power as a systemic source of conflict. It seems hard to believe this has happened just because of simple oversight. Perhaps this is due to the control of social discourse by the elites that Freire (1997) describes. Folger et al. (2005) state that a strategy the powerful used to hold onto power is by keeping it as invisible as possible. The reason for this is that power that is not seen cannot be challenged. The powerful can therefore be expected to use their power to keep the role of power in conflict from being identified.

The comments by participant D were particularly notable as she linked power to knowledge. Foucault (1977, p.27) also argued that knowledge is a form of power:

There is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time, power relations.

This means that from Foucault's perspective CEOs who do not share knowledge with staff are actually using their systemic power over their staff. Participant D pointed out that she liked to share the organisational knowledge and so was obviously aware of this dynamic. Participant D seemed to be fully applying Foucault's (1976) theories in how she approached power. Participant C's comments about how the mailroom assistant would not have any more perceived power than the operations manager indicated that the organisation that Participant D managed deliberately avoided using overt sovereign power and was run using the disciplinary power of discourses that Foucault (1976) described. That the organisation she ran enjoyed such success it became a market leader indicates that this approach can work well. While it is outside the scope of this thesis it would be interesting to conduct further research to fully explore the implications of managing organisations using disciplinary power rather than both sovereign and disciplinary power. Foucault's views on power represent the social constructionist position and his position is acknowledged by Burr (2003) as the position of social constructionism regarding power.

Participant M's comment that power affects every relationship in daily life can also be linked to Foucault. Hall (2003) said that people normally view power as radiating in one direction, from top to bottom. However according to Hall (2003) Foucault did not share this view as he believed power circulates and permeates all levels of social existence.

Hocker and Wilmot (1995) identified that power could be used either constructively or destructively and this was a point that was confirmed by a number of participants. Collectively these comments demonstrate that power is a complex issue. This implies that it would be helpful in further research into workplace conflict to go into the issue of power in depth. As it is such an important aspect of workplace conflict it needs to be fully understood. However while further research into power is recommended the participants responses indicating that power is a systemic issue in workplace conflict were clear.

#### **Theme 4: The CEO is the key element affecting levels of conflict in organisations**

Participant A had the view that the CEO was responsible for everything, including the level of conflict that occurs in an organisation:

The boss is the key. You set the tempo of your organisation and you get a boss who is unfair or stupid or irrational, it goes down the organisation. So there is nothing but 'the buck stops here', with the boss.

Other participants were more differentiated identifying that the culture in an organisation comes from the chief executive and that the level of conflict in organisations depended on the culture or management style set by the CEO. Participant I explained this point:

Organisations will have a culture, consciously or unconsciously they'll have a culture. Some will have the effect of minimising conflict and some may have the effect of maximising or encouraging conflict.

Participant M, a counsellor working within a large organisation explained this as "The workplace culture comes from management, so it comes from the very top". She went on to say that what happens down the line reflects what is happening at the top and that when she sees who the individual is at the top it explains what is happening down the line. This qualification made it clear that she believed the influence of the CEO influenced the behaviours of the staff.

Participant D was also clearly of the view that organisational culture is set by the CEO. She referred to "the people at the top" but then explained how she as CEO set the culture in the organisations she managed:

I think organisational culture is totally dependent on the values and ethics of the people at the top. How they are, what their culture is, who they are as people, will determine which culture you get. I have a view that the long term outcome is much better with a collaborative positive culture but that's just because I like that. I've got no evidence to support this as I have never run an organisation any other way.

What participants meant by culture was not fully explored. The six participants who believed they had experienced harmonious workplaces spoke about the approach of the CEO, something that could be described as management style. Participant D linked culture to management style and explained how management styles can both create and minimise levels of conflict:

I definitely think that there are management styles that create conflict, encourage conflict and feed it and that's the sort of divide and conquer, the ego, the my team, the



competitive kind of internal environment and then there are cultures that as I say encourage people to address issues safe in the knowledge that is they do it will be addressed and in a way that makes sense for the whole organisation and not in a way that leaves them exposed as the whistle blower.

Those participants that linked organisational culture to levels of workplace conflict claimed this is the case both where there are high levels of destructive conflict and where there are low levels of destructive conflict. The six participants who had experienced harmonious workplaces all explained these as being due to the approach taken by the CEO. Their comments have already been mentioned in the theme on the need for respect. They explicitly link low levels of workplace conflict to the management style of the CEO.

High levels of workplace conflict were also linked to the culture and management style of the CEO: Participant K thought an organisational culture of blame was the key cause of destructive conflict “The number one factor affecting levels of destructive conflict is when there is a culture that is blaming”.

Participant D, a high profile CEO, agreed with the dangers of having a blame culture. She had no doubt that blame cultures were created by CEOs. She explained her view on why some CEOs foster blaming cultures as:

I think there's either a lack of awareness that it's happening or a lack of understanding of how much damage it can do, a kind of opt out strategy at the top, or there's a deliberate strategy which is to run the organisation on the basis of divide and conquer. CEOs make parts of the organisation compete against each other, we isolate them, we only share information according to what we want to occur.

As organisational culture was seen as so important I was able to ask how organisations pass their culture onto staff. Participant D detailed how she thought management should approach explaining to staff how the culture in the organisation worked:

Make sure up front people are aware of the culture they are coming into and how conflict is resolved. That is when you have conflict you raise your hand to say something, first of all to the person causing the problem, but if you don't feel comfortable then say something to management. If you don't then you are driving that conflict because you are not giving the organisation any opportunity. The other thing is, for example, if you make a false complaint you're just as guilty as someone who undertakes conflict causing behaviour. So don't do it because if we find that's what you've done we are taking you down the disciplinary path.

Participant L, a mediator who specialised in organisational mediation gave a response consistent with this, identifying communication and explaining the culture during the induction process as being critical.

If the CEO sets the culture then it means that staff change their behaviours to reflect the culture set by the CEO. Participant D confirmed from her perspective this was the case. She was a CEO with a track record of successfully growing a number of organisations. When I asked how many, she mentioned she had been able to successfully grow four. One of these was a major financial institution that had a good reputation for having a harmonious workplace culture. She was at the head of this organisation when it was taken over. She was asked to stay, but not as CEO. This meant she was in the rather unique position of being able to observe what happened to the culture she had created. I was able to ask about what had been her most important realisations. Her response was that she had thought about this a lot and while she did not appreciate it at the time the biggest realisation she had come to had to do with people and how most did not live according to personal values, gained their sense of identity from their job and would change their behaviours to fit in with the culture in their workplace.

When she fully understood the money focused culture of the new owners she realised that it did not match her values. She “couldn’t be what the new owners wanted me to be” and so she left. She expected that a large number of the senior management team would also struggle with the new culture and leave and was surprised to discover that this did not occur. Almost all of them changed their behaviours to comply with the new culture. She estimated around 95% of the management team changed behaviours to fit in with the new culture. This surprised her “It was a complete shock to me that you could be one thing and then another”. While this participant was the only one to verbally identify that staff changed their behaviours to reflect the culture set by the CEO it was indirectly acknowledged by most other participants. This is because they spoke about organisational culture, something that is only possible if staff change their behaviours to adapt to the new culture.

## **Discussion**

While the view that the CEO sets the management style seems common sense, that the CEO was responsible for the culture in an organisation was not a theme that emerged at any stage in the literature review. In fact only one source even identified organisational culture as

being an important aspect of workplace conflict. Morrill (1995) claims organisational culture is important but that organisational structure is responsible for organisational culture. This implies that management personalities, behaviours and values only indirectly affect organisational culture. This seems a little simplistic and the participants' answers contradict Morrill. It also seems a little simplistic to claim it is the CEO alone that is responsible for organisational culture as there may be other factors involved. However this research takes a grounded theory approach which means the data is the source of the theory. The participants expressed that the CEO is responsible for the workplace culture. Folger et al. (2005) provide a previously mentioned insight into why this area may have been overlooked by researchers when they explain that organisations and people try to avoid the issue of power as it contradicts society's values of equality and democracy. This means it can be expected that the actual influence of a CEO will be downplayed in order for organisations to appear to be seen as equitable.

The participants indicated that the values, behaviours and ethics of the CEO were critical and that these influenced staff members. However exactly how this occurs was not clearly identified by participants. Social constructionism and Foucault's (1976) identification of disciplinary power provide an explanation for how this may occur. This is that the CEO sets the discourses that the staff adapt to.

Explaining the culture to staff was mentioned as important by two participants. However one of these participants also mentioned that she was not told about the culture when new owners took over and had to learn by observation. This implies that culture may not need to be explained to staff. Other participants indicated there were more complex factors involved. The six participants who had experienced harmonious workplaces described the personality, approach, values and ethics of the CEO as being important. The values and ethics of the CEO were also identified as being important by one participant who had not experienced a harmonious workplace.

What the participants meant when they talked about organisational culture was not explored. However their responses were consistent with the previously mentioned definition of organisational culture given by Beyerlein and Harris (2004 p.224). This is:

A pattern of shared organisational values, basic underlying assumptions and informal norms that guide the way work is accomplished in an organisation. It is the unwritten

way that work gets done and does not necessarily align with formal policies and procedures.

The manager who had been able to witness the effects of a change in owner on the culture gave an interesting explanation of what she thought took place. She believed most people get their sense of identity from their job. Relying on a job for identity creates a dependency that means that staff tend to demonstrate the behaviours they believe they will be rewarded for by their boss. This results in a tendency by staff to reflect the behaviour of their boss and thus a change in CEO behaviours could result in staff changing behaviour patterns. However as she was the only participant that was prepared to try to explain why this dynamic occurred this explanation requires further supporting research before it can be viewed as compelling.

Kolb (2008) provides a previously mentioned but useful insight as to why the literature has overlooked the influence of the CEO on organisational culture, when she identifies the tendency for organisations to try to keep disputes at an individual level as a power holding strategy by the organisation. This means that conflict that is a result of the culture established by the CEO can be expected to be hidden and reframed as the result of difficult individuals within the organisation. Folger et al. (2005) have a previously mentioned view consistent with this as they point out that the powerful actively try to prevent those they have power over becoming too aware of their power. They say that if the power was visible it would create a risk of alienating those whose endorsement is required for the power to exist. This suggests that the reason that the CEO is not identified as the source of an organisation's culture in the literature is because of power.

The estimate that 95% of staff will change their behaviours to reflect those of the CEO came from one participant. The participant appeared to think that personality was something that was stable and did not change and was surprised to see that in others it did. As the Milgram experiments, social constructionists and Robbins et al. (2008) identify that environmental factors influence personality there is strong scholarship support for the idea that as the environment changes so does personality. This means it is to be expected that 100% of staff change their behaviours according to the environment.

As the literature review did not identify that there was a relationship between levels of destructive conflict in organisations and the management style and culture created by the

CEO, it raises the issue of why this was overlooked in the literature. While it is not possible to answer this question with confidence, this situation is certainly consistent with the views expressed in the literature review on power. For example it has previously been mentioned that Folger et al. (2005) claim power is kept out of sight in an attempt to respect societies' values of fairness. As the CEO in an organisation is the ultimate power figure it is to be expected from these comments that CEO power will be kept hidden.

**Theme 5: Gender and cultural differences cause conflict when accompanied by disrespect. However the type of conflict may not necessarily be problematic.**

Three aspects of diversity; gender, culture and personality were dealt with separately in the interviews. The answers regarding gender and culture were so similar it made sense to group them together and they are as follows:

**Gender**

There were a broad range of responses to the question about the role of gender in workplace conflict. A number of the participants made the effort to dispel the idea of gender stereotypes and in particular that women were typically more nurturing and looked for harmony in situations more than men did. Participant K said "I have seen just as many men who are counsellor managers as I have seen women who are competitive managers. So I think personality is more important". Participant L, a management trainer commented "For me gender doesn't play any role at all. It's the personality of the person, whether they are conducive to working with people". Participant F, an experienced mediator, agreed that gender was not a major factor in workplace conflict, saying "I don't see that much difference in the way that people respond to conflict based on gender".

In fact only one participant believed that men and women handle conflict differently. The rest said that there was no difference in how people of different genders respond to conflict. The common theme in answers to the question on gender was that respect was important and that

if there was a lack of respect based on gender then that situation impacted on levels of conflict. A mediator explains “Its gender and respect”.

However participant K gave an example where both issues of gender and culture created a potentially explosive situation. In this situation an Indian woman had been promoted and then some Indian men were recruited below her:

The Indian guys were saying ‘we’re not working under an Indian woman, we’ll work for a European woman but we will not work in a team with an Indian woman at the helm.’ It was amazing, so they changed the teams around. Even the woman in that position said ‘I can’t lead this team. I’ll lead it with any other nationalities.’

This narrative shows how Indian gender values created a problem situation in New Zealand. As it transpired management respected these values and so problem conflict was avoided.

While most participants did not consider gender differences as a major source of destructive conflict in New Zealand workplaces it was pointed out that women in New Zealand are still being disrespected as they are discriminated against purely on the basis of gender. Participant G, a woman, said “We are still being discriminated against. We are still not paid enough and it’s blatant. It’s not even hidden”.

## **Culture**

The literature review identified how different cultures dealt differently with conflict. Participants gave answers that were consistent with this. For example Participant K said:

There are definitely different cultural paradigms. If you look at Samoan people for example they won’t tend to come forward or speak up at a conflict situation. They’ll tend to fall back and they like to be told what to do. It’s a very cultural, strong cultural theme working with Pacific Islanders even some of the Asian cultures like to be told what to do and how to do it. They like quite structured workplace environments.

Participant K also gave the example used in the section on gender, of Indian men refusing to work for an Indian woman manager. These examples show that there are differences between how people react to conflict based on culture. However cultural differences do not need to be

a source of conflict if there is respect as participant G points out “ It comes back to respect, trying to understand someone else’s point of view”.

This point was expanded upon by participant M, who explained the risk of the dominant culture not respecting other cultures “If you are in a dominant culture you have to be real careful you don’t plaster that all over other people”.

Participant G believed that culture was a bigger conflict issue in New Zealand than many other countries and that there was a tendency in New Zealand to be disrespectful of other cultures. She blamed it on our isolation “I think we are very isolated and I think we can be really, really insulting”.

## **Discussion**

The answers to the question about gender showed that men and women respond to conflict in a similar way and in this respect gender by itself does not result in different levels of conflict. However the participants pointed out that when gender and disrespect occurred together then that could impact on levels of conflict. Finally it was shown that women were still being disrespected as they were being paid less than men. Evidence of how women are being financially disrespected in the workplace was revealed in the literature review. The OECD (2010) claims women in New Zealand are only paid 90% of what men are paid. This shows that while gender need not be a factor in workplace conflict, it is a factor because women are still disrespected. That the participants did not identify a higher level of destructive conflict due to gender is interesting because there is clearly ongoing disrespect.

The example of the Indian woman was problematic for me. In respecting Indian patriarchal values and both sides’ desires, management seemed to avoid dealing with an issue that should have been confronted. The problem was ignored rather than resolved.

The responses on culture show how different cultures handle conflict differently. They also identified that with respect different cultures could work together. One participant felt that unfortunately in New Zealand there is a tendency for people not to respect other cultures.

The views on how culture impacts on conflict in the literature review were mixed. Lulofs and Cahn (2000) did not take a clear position. Folger et al. (2005) however claim cultural

differences can result in longer and more intense conflicts. This is because people stereotype others based on these differences.

It was clear from the way the participants reacted to the questions about gender and culture that in spite of the presence of disrespect the participants did not view them as critical issues with respect to causing problem levels of destructive workplace conflict. Only one participant mentioned that women were still being unfairly treated and this is significant as nine of the participants were female. Furthermore only two participants mentioned or implied that cultural disrespect occurred in New Zealand. This indicates that the participants were not of the view that destructive conflict caused by gender and cultural differences is a major problem in New Zealand workplaces. Harris and Crothers (2010) conducted quantitative research in New Zealand that achieved results consistent with this view. 91% of their participants reported that it was rare for gender to be a factor causing conflict in their workplaces.

A possible explanation of why this may be the case comes from the literature review. In the literature review conflict was identified as normal (Tillett & French, 2006; Tillett, 1999; Stitt, 1998; Lulofs & Cahn, 2000; Brandon & Robertson, 2007; Ellis & Anderson, 2005; Eunson, 2007; Masters & Albright, 2002; Cahn & Abigail, 2007). Conflict was also identified as becoming a problem when an organisation experiences excessive levels of escalated destructive conflict (Pruitt, 2008). This means identifying that gender and cultural disrespect occurs in New Zealand workplaces does not necessarily mean that these will result in problem levels of workplace conflict. For there to be problem workplace conflict excessive levels of destructive conflict need to be occurring. The responses to the questions on gender and culture indicate that based on the work experiences in New Zealand of the participants in this study, gender and cultural differences are not major sources of destructive conflict.

On reflection Pruitt (2008) identified that problem levels of destructive conflict are caused by conflict escalation and this is caused by retaliation. Retaliatory behaviour would seem to often involve short term escalatory behaviours. Perhaps the type of conflict can change from destructive conflict to a type of long term strategic conflict when there is a long term pattern of disrespect as seems to be the case with gender. If so then this long term type of conflict may not be problematic in the sense of it costing organisations excessive levels of money. It should be appreciated that there was not broad consensus with the answers to these questions.



Given the small number of participants interviewed this lack of consensus is understandable and further research is required in this area.

Many Social constructionists would consider gender and culture are socially constructed. They would therefore not refer to gender and cultural differences but instead to the discourses around gender and culture. From this perspective it is easier to resolve conflict in this area than from an essentialist perspective. This is because change in discourse is something that Burr (2003) says can occur. Change is more problematic with essentialist concepts of gender and culture. As social constructionists also view conflict as socially constructed the finding that the type of conflict may not necessarily be destructive suggests that there are some unidentified discourses that may explain why this is the case. Further research is therefore required.

#### **Theme 6: Personality is a critical but complex factor affecting levels of destructive workplace conflict**

Most participants identified linked staff with difficult personalities to higher levels of conflict. However these types of staff often are the ones that companies look to recruit. Participant C worked as HR manager for a large financial services organisation. She identified the dilemma organisations faced with personality by both explaining how organisations look for staff with drive and ambition and how people like this tend to be egotistical and need to be carefully managed. The organisation she worked for had a collaborative culture that meant it took a hard line with people with difficult egos. If they did not change their behaviours to fit in with the organisational culture they were forced to leave the company, as she explained:

If somebody had too much of an ego it wouldn't be tolerated. They would be taken aside and told you've got to treat people according to the way things are in the organisational culture. Anybody that was making things difficult for the company was told about that and if it got too bad they would not stay with the company.

She gave an example of one of the managers who was forced to leave and said that the company paid more than this manager expected in order to get rid of her. For an organisation

to be so intolerant of difficult personalities that it would spend money to get rid people who did not fit in with the culture is an example of personality being taken extremely seriously.

Other participants gave answers consistent with the view that people with difficult personalities caused higher levels of conflict. Difficult personality types that led to higher levels of conflict were identified by some participants as people who thrived on conflict and people who were overly aggressive. Some participants focused on ego as the driving force behind difficult personalities. For example participant D identified “The danger areas are egos. It’s the ego of the person driving whatever they are driving”.

Participant I, when asked as to the type of personality that made the best employees, answered:

People who are prepared to listen, subjugate their ego and communicate clearly with others would surely be more compatible in an organisation than people who were not prepared to listen, not prepared to subjugate their ego and walk over everybody else.

He identified that having large egos tends to lead to people walking over everybody else. Walking over ones workmates is obviously behaviour that is disrespectful towards them. Participant G also stressed the importance of respect for work colleagues as she identified the most important feature to look for in recruits as being that they respect other people.

While these responses show there are aspects of personality that can affect levels of conflict in organisations, participant F stressed that it was how these aspects of personality were managed that often determined how much destructive conflict resulted from them:

I think the managers have a lot to do with it. I think it is important that you have managers who are skilled at communication and comfortable with conflict. If you’ve got managers that are conflict avoiders that will do anything they can to just smooth things over then you are going to have more conflict.

She went on to qualify this view by stating that even with good managers there can be problem levels of conflict when team members behave badly.

Participant D had yet another perspective on personality and its impact on levels of destructive conflict, believing personality can change with good management:

Staff are the same. It's not so much who they are when they come on board; it's who they are while they are with you and a lot of that is how you behave and how you drive their behaviour. People are a little bit chameleon like in that sense. I think they take a lot of pride if they understand that ultimately what they're doing is the right thing and I think it must cause a lot of stress when they are doing something that's getting them ahead in their career that may not be the right thing. I think most people are what they do and understanding that helps you understand where they're coming from.

## **Discussion**

Earlier in this chapter it was shown that staff change their behaviours to reflect those of the CEO. In the discussion of personality in the literature review a broad definition of personality from Robbins et al. (2008, p.104) defined personality as: "The sum total of ways in which an individual reacts and interacts with others". This definition implies the terms personality and behaviours are synonymous in respect to verbal interactions between people. It means the way people react and interact with others at work is due to a combination of the impact of the personality of the CEO, who sets the organisational culture, as well as their own personalities. Thus the personality of the CEO was identified as an important factor affecting levels of destructive conflict in organisations.

The personality of individual staff members was also identified by the participants as an important aspect of workplace conflict. There was a strong consensus about this. Evidence of the importance of individual personality is that a large organisation, which had a collaborative culture and a good reputation for its harmonious work environment, took personality so seriously that it was not prepared to tolerate the presence of staff with difficult personalities who did not change their behaviours to fit in with the organisation's culture.

The view that good management can deal with difficult personalities means it is too simplistic to blame difficult personalities for problem workplace conflict. However the response that even with good management difficult personalities can still cause problem levels of conflict means that it is also too simplistic to take the view that a series of factors need to be present for difficult personalities to cause problem levels of destructive workplace conflict. Furthermore the view that staff are 'chameleon like' and can change their behaviours when they are at work is also significant. It means identifying someone with a difficult personality does not necessarily mean they will cause conflict problems in the workplace.

They may use different less problematic behaviours in the workplace, influenced by the CEO. That most staff may be capable of changing their behaviours means that problem personality issues may only appear with a small minority of staff.

The comments about how organisations both want the drive and energy linked to competitive personalities while not wanting the destructive conflict these personalities can cause highlights a dilemma organisations face. They want staff with drive and energy and these are often the trouble makers.

The answers to the questions about personality, which indicated staff change their personalities and behaviours to fit in with the culture set by the CEO, were consistent with the psychological research on personality. The Milgram experiments emphatically demonstrated this point.

Many social constructionists do not believe there is such a thing as a personality (Burr, 2003). Instead they would focus on the discourses that have led us to believe personality exists. As Burr (2003) identifies that people behave differently in different situations social constructionists have a position that is relatively consistent with situationism. The anti-essentialist aspect of social constructionism she identifies means it opposes essentialist concepts of personality.

### **Theme 7: Managers were critical of ADR and mediation**

In the literature review doubts were raised over the usefulness of ADR based conflict management systems. This was based on the evidence that in spite of ADR systems in many workplaces levels of destructive workplace conflict in the US are continuing to rise (Masters & Albright, 2002). However some of the participants were even more critical of these systems than the literature was. One view that emerged, that was not presented in the literature review, was that conflict management systems are an example of how organisations try to use process to deal with people, rather than management. This was seen by participants as a symptom of management opting out. Participant G explains this as:

A manager is a manager of people but they don't want to be. They want to be a manager of process. So what they've done with those conflict management systems is put in place another process. What are we doing about the behaviour that is creating

the need for the process? We are not coming back to the beginning. We are coming half-way down and saying 'oh, band-aid quick'.

Participant D took a similar position:

I don't think conflict management systems work. Its people you are dealing with and personalities and behaviours, often which are not driven by something that has happened in the workplace.

Her view was that it was impractical to try to systemise a way of dealing with conflicts when there were so many variables involved.

Non management participants were more supportive of ADR based conflict management systems. Participant E, who was a judge, said they were "Important because the alternative is to be forced to litigate through the court process which is costly, often counter-productive and is not conducive to win-win". Participant M, who was a therapist in a Government department, was also supportive, saying "I think it's really good to have a path, especially in big organisations". She believed it was beneficial to know that there was step by step process that could be gone through, particularly when dealing with very difficult people.

Mediation was identified in the literature review as the most important ADR in terms of workplace conflict in New Zealand and thus a question was asked about the usefulness of mediation. Perhaps predictably, the participants who had backgrounds as mediators or in non-management sectors all thought that mediation was very useful. Participant F, a mediator, said:

I think the real strength is that if you've got people that are just not able to communicate, maybe they've tried and because of their misunderstandings or their own differences and background, then I find that mediation is a really good way to get people to hear each other, to understand each other's needs, then come up with some solutions and pick something they feel happy with to move forward. Through the process they learn how to communicate with each other. They not only get the solution to that problem but they also gain some skills so that in the future they don't get in that place again.

She went on to stress that while mediation could work well with interpersonal disputes it did not work well when there were underlying systemic issues that were causing the conflict. She

made the point that mediation assumes that there is an interpersonal problem that needs to be dealt with. Participant F said she found that often there were systemic issues that needed to be addressed. She identified the way she obtained permission to look at these issues:

If I find some organisational issues that need to be addressed are you willing to address those because if I don't get that, then you know I've got a lot of my arrows out of my quiver. If you sort out what's going on between those individuals but don't sort out the systemic source of it then you are just going to have it occur again.

She said that this approach enabled her to address systemic issues that organisations were often not anticipating would be identified.

The participants who had backgrounds in management all were critical of mediation. As an example a management consultant, participant G, explained the reasons for having this view:

Mediation is an ambulance at the bottom of the cliff. It's like having to walk through mud every day to get to work and apparently, once you arrive, you are not going to be muddy. I mean the fact is that the mud's still in the office. You come back to dysfunction and you are going to try to cope with that dysfunction. Not going to work.

Participant H, a training manager who worked with managers endorsed this view "I don't always believe that mediation gets down to the nuts and bolts of the issue. I think it's looking at the surface level, like the icing on the cake".

## **Discussion**

That ADR based conflict management systems were introduced as a way for managers to hand the problems of having to deal with conflicts over to a process was not mentioned in the literature. However it appears to be a robust argument as it is hard to imagine any manager not supporting an initiative that means they do not have to spend so much time dealing with conflict. On reflection it would also appear that having a process means that if things go wrong the process can be blamed rather than the manager. Thus the interviews have identified another likely explanation for why ADR based workplace conflict management systems have enjoyed such strong support in the US. On reflection it is understandable that this reason was not identified in the literature. Most managers would not wish to identify that

a desire to avoid dealing with conflict was a motivating factor in their decision to introduce an ADR based workplace conflict management system into their workplace.

One of the interesting aspects to the responses about ADR and mediation is that the participants fitted into two clear groups. One group were conflict professionals and they supported ADR and mediation. The other group were from management backgrounds and they were united in their criticism of ADR and mediation. Conflict professionals who work using ADR and mediation would seem to have a vested interest in supporting these approaches. Their livelihoods are reliant on mediation and as they are part of the conflict resolution industry they can be expected to be aware of the discourses around conflict in the conflict literature. However that the participants with management backgrounds were united in opposition to these approaches was unexpected. This is because if these approaches are used as a means for management to control their disempowered staff, as Scimecca (1993) suggested, then it could be expected that participants from management backgrounds would be supportive of both ADR and mediation. In this respect the answers from management were inconsistent with what the literature review concluded. It was clear from their responses that the participants with backgrounds in management were unaware of the way that ADR and mediation could be used to disempower staff. Their answers to the questions on ADR and mediation were consistent with their motivation being to use these approaches to resolve conflicts rather than as a means of controlling staff. In an ironic sense this illuminated the need for more differentiated thinking in this area. It showed that it is not accurate to automatically generalise that management use ADR as a means to disempower staff as it is over simplistic.

That participant F identified systemic factors as causing conflict in organisations was notable. This is because this view was not expressed as a possibility in the majority of the conflict literature reviewed. Weber (1948) clearly had the view that conflict was a systemic issue and as one of the founders of the area of modern conflict resolution his views should have been known by all contemporary conflict theorists. However Lulofs and Cahn (2000), Tillett and French (2005) and Cahn and Abigail (2007) did not mention that systemic factors could cause conflict.

Participant F was the only respondent to verbally identify that systemic factors were often the cause of workplace conflict. However many of the other themes imply workplace conflict is

often related to systemic factors. For example the themes on the influence of the CEO and power identify these as systemic factors in workplace conflict. This means that her comments actually reflect a consensus view. The failure to consider systemic factors in much of the conflict literature therefore appears to be problematic. The careful way participant F obtained permission from management to look at systemic problems and her subsequent comments showed she was well aware that this was a sensitive area that needed to be very carefully dealt with.

Participant F also pointed out that mediation assumes that there is an interpersonal problem that needs to be dealt with. This was a point that was only alluded to in the literature review by Able (1982) who said ADR techniques individualised conflict.

In New Zealand mediation is recognised by legislation for dealing with workplace conflict. Thus approaches that assume workplace conflict is not caused by systemic factors have been empowered by legislation in New Zealand. The identification of systemic factors frequently being involved in workplace conflict indicates that this legislation has overlooked a critical aspect of workplace conflict.

As Participant F is a mediator and openly acknowledges mediation assumes problems are interpersonal it is hard to understand how she could actually address systemic issues. It would be interesting to explore this further and see what arrows she had in her quiver to deal with systemic issues. The assumption behind mediation, that the problem being addressed is individualised, is consistent with the previously mentioned comments by Kolb (2008). She identifies a tendency for organisations to try to keep disputes at the individual level as a power holding strategy.

As social constructionism looks at discourse the social constructionist position is that there are problematic aspects to the discourses around ADR and mediation. This position is consistent with that of Folger et al. (2005) who asserted that the problem with mediation was with the version of mediation that had gained mainstream acceptance rather than with mediation in its entirety.



## **Theme 8: Mediation is time sensitive**

One aspect of mediation that the scholarship did not identify is that there is often a window of time in which mediation can be effective. A human resources manager, participant K, explained this as:

By the time HR is called in to mediate, the problem is beyond resolution. One party will then choose to move on in my experience. It's always great when you can resolve it but I have got very few examples of where it has actually worked effectively and in my experience in other businesses I would say the same. By the time the relationship has broken down to the degree that the conflict has become escalated, it's beyond repair because one party won't be committed to resolving it.

Participant M, who worked as a therapist for a government department, had a similar perspective:

I have experienced more weaknesses than positives. I have experienced conflict getting too bad before mediation so that nothing could resolve it really. Somebody had to walk and so the mediation just made it all worse. The positions were entrenched there and people were jumping on each others' backs and goodwill and understanding had long gone.

She qualified her comments by adding "If a manager's capable of mediating and mediating quickly, that can work. I've found that can work really well". Participant I, a lawyer, agreed using mediation early could work well "If you could have mediation done in the early stage, in a sense in the informal stage, I think you're more likely to resolve".

These comments identified that timing was important with mediation and the participants responses indicated that once conflict had escalated and positions were entrenched the time for successful application of mediation had passed.

## **Discussion**

The identification of mediation as being more likely to be effective if it occurred early in the life of a conflict was something that was not given weight in the literature. The literature focused on process rather than timing of intervention. Only Pruitt (2008) mentioned timing was important as he advocated looking for a ripe moment. However Pruitt (2008) was

referring to a moment in the process of dealing with an escalated conflict when the parties are receptive. This differs from the participants' views which were that if mediation was used before positions had become entrenched it was more likely to be effective.

Masters and Albright (2002) assert that levels of workplace conflict in America are continuing to rise despite widespread use of ADR. Given that Riekert (1990), Mackie (1991), Lulofs and Cahn (2000) and Cahn and Abigail (2007) all define ADR as including all means for resolving disputes this could be interpreted as meaning that reducing levels of workplace conflict is something that is very difficult to achieve. However it could also mean that there is a problem with the way ADR is being used that explains its inability to reduce levels of destructive conflict. This latter explanation was explored in the discussion of ADR in the literature review. Using the analogy of destructive conflict as having fallen off a cliff it was pointed out that ADR focused on bottom of the cliff remedies that logically had no hope of reducing levels of conflicts becoming destructive and falling off the cliff. It was argued that to reduce numbers of destructive conflicts, approaches that worked before the conflicts became destructive were needed. The participants' responses indicating that mediation can work well if it is used early in the life of a conflict, before it has become destructive, provide useful support for this argument. Their responses suggest that it is possible for the ADR approach of mediation to reduce levels of destructive conflict if it is used before the conflict has escalated and become destructive. This implies that lack of appreciation of the importance of timing may partially explain why ADR in America is failing to reduce levels of conflict in workplaces.

According to Lipsky et al. (2003) many organisations currently use reactive ADR based conflict resolution systems. They describe ADR based conflict management systems that are typically focused on dealing with conflict that has become escalated and destructive. The participants' responses indicate that a more proactive approach needs to be taken in organisations to identify and bring resources to help resolve conflicts early on in their life cycles before they have become escalated.

Social constructionists would be likely to reframe this theme as the need for a discourse that mediation is time sensitive. Social constructionists would look at mediation as socially constructed by discourses.

## **Theme 9: The need for staff to be trained in conflict resolution**

The CPP Global Human Capital Report (2008) identified training staff in conflict resolution as the most effective action that companies could take to reduce levels of destructive conflict. The participants also all thought training staff in conflict resolution was very important. Participant G, who had studied conflict resolution and had a particular interest in this area, explained why she thought it was so important to train in this area:

I have learnt one thing studying conflict resolution and that is conflict is all around us, internally, externally, everywhere in all sorts of different ways and it manifests in different ways. Get good at it. That's it, just accept it and get good at it. I think training in conflict resolution is vital.

Participants A and F both described it as essential and every other respondent described it as very important. Participant M said training in conflict resolution was:

Very important because it gives people the language, it gives them an understanding that there are other ways from what they have been used to. I think that if you keep yourself updated with new research, new understandings of dangerous types of things like mobbing or the variations of how bullying happens, all of that can be very helpful.

## **Discussion**

There was unanimous agreement from the participants as to the importance and value of training in conflict resolution. The CPP Global Human Capital Report (2008) was also strongly supportive of the idea that staff should be trained in conflict resolution. Based largely on the figures in the CPP Global Human Capital Report (2008) it was shown in the literature review that organisations in America that were in the bottom 10% in terms of the levels of conflict they were experiencing, could face annual costs of more than US\$20,000 per employee. As Harris and Crothers (2010) found similar levels of conflict to those occurring in America occurred in New Zealand it can be assumed that the per employee costs involved in handling conflict badly in New Zealand are also broadly similar to the costs in America. This means there is strong financial logic behind investing in training staff in conflict resolution particularly in organisations where conflict is a problem.

The commentary by participant M identified how training in conflict resolution gives people the language and understanding to take different approaches in conflict situations. This means training in conflict resolution can change patterns of conflict escalation. This is consistent with the findings in the CPP Global Human Capital Report (2008) that training staff in conflict management is highly effective. As has been previously mentioned, CPP found 58% of the participants in their survey that had received training said they now looked for win-win outcomes from conflict. As it was concluded in the literature review that efforts to resolve conflict needed to focus on preventing conflict becoming escalated and destructive, training is also an approach that satisfies this recommendation.

Nevertheless the CPP Global Human Capital Report (2008) shows that most staff receive no training in conflict resolution. Harris and Crothers (2010) identified that this was also the case in New Zealand. It is hard to understand why organisations have not devoted more resources to training staff in conflict resolution as it appears that there is a broad consensus that it is highly effective. Furthermore the potential savings mean that the financial logic for investing in training is compelling, particularly for organisations in the bottom 10%.

Social constructionists would identify the problem as there not being a discourse that staff should be trained in conflict resolution. They would say organisations do not train staff in conflict resolution because there is no discourse that they should train staff in conflict resolution.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusion**

### **A grounded theory: Problem levels of destructive conflict in organisations are often caused by systemic factors**

There is a grounded theory that explains much of what the semi structured interviews revealed. It can also be applied in a way that may help in situations where problem levels of workplace conflict are occurring. This grounded theory is that problem levels of destructive conflict in organisations are often caused by systemic factors. This contrasts with much of the literature which does not acknowledge that systemic factors may be involved in conflict. Nearly half the themes identified were consistent with this theory, these were:

**Theme 2: The need for respect in the workplace.** Staff feeling the need to be respected by management in order for there to be less workplace conflict was the main need identified by this theme. This is a systemic need rather than an individualised one. It is related to the power figures in the organisation respecting the less powerful.

**Theme 3: Power is a key aspect of workplace conflict.** Power was identified by the participants as a systemic issue. Every example of problem conflict situations involving power in the workplace that participants gave had a common feature. This was that in every case participants described the systemic use of power as being the problem.

**Theme 4: The CEO is the key element affecting levels of destructive conflict in organisations.** This theme identified how the CEO was a key factor determining both high and low levels of conflict in organisations. This theme links the head of the organisational system, to levels of conflict in the organisation. According to this theme levels of conflict in an organisation are largely driven by systemic factors.

**Theme 6: Personality is a critical but complex factor affecting levels of destructive conflict in organisations.** While it appears reasonable to assume that workplace conflicts due to personality issues are individualised interpersonal conflicts this theme challenges this assumption. The participants' answers indicated that staff personalities and behaviours change according to the personality and values of the power figure in an organisation, who is normally the CEO. The literature reviewed on conflict contained no references to this dynamic. However the conflict literature is largely theoretical and seems to lack research backing. Mainstream psychology research views personality as something that can change

according to environment. (Benjamin & Simpson, 2009). It is also a view that is consistent with social constructionism (Burr, 2003).

## **Discussion**

Given the number of themes that emerged from the interviews that linked workplace conflict to systemic factors it is notable that much of the conflict resolution literature contained very little reference to systemic conflict. This is surprising particularly as Jaffee (2008) identifies that organisational conflict has its origins as systemic conflict in the industrial revolution, where workers, concerned about their loss of freedom and autonomy, began to resist and rebel against capitalist employers and the way they used power.

One implication of systemic factors having an important role in workplace conflict is that conflict theorists should, when differentiating between types of conflict, distinguish between conflict caused by systemic and that caused by individual factors. However most of the conflict literature reviewed did not consider that there may be systemic factors behind conflict. Both Lulofs and Cahn (2000) and Cahn and Abigail (2007) mention systems theory but do not mention that there could be systemic factors affecting conflict. They take the position that types of conflict can be differentiated on the basis of whether the issue is real or not.

Ellis and Anderson (2005) differentiate conflict on the basis of whether it is about values, interests or cognitive differences rather than whether it is influenced by systemic or individual factors. Tillett and French (2005) differentiate conflict on the basis of the relationship between the parties. They identify employment conflict as a separate type of conflict but do not consider that there may be systemic factors involved in workplace conflict. Brandon and Robertson (2007) wrote their book about workplace conflict and yet managed to somehow avoid identifying that there may be systemic factors involved in some workplace conflict.

Jaffee (2008) and Masters and Albright (2005) mention that systemic factors are involved in some workplace conflicts but then drop the topic. For example Masters and Albright (2005) wrote their book about ADR, an approach that individualises conflict (Able, 1982). They did not discuss the appropriateness of ADR for dealing with conflicts that have systemic aspects.

Collectively these conflict researchers have for some reason either acknowledged and ignored or failed to acknowledge that systemic issues may be involved in conflict.

Their failure to consider that systemic factors may be involved in workplace conflict provides a potential explanation for why Masters and Albright (2002) identified that levels of destructive conflict in organisations in the US are still rising. This is that efforts to address problem levels of workplace conflict are trying to solve the problem with approaches based on the assumption that problem levels of workplace conflict are due to individual factors when they often involve systemic factors as well. There is obviously little chance of success in trying to treat systemically sourced conflict with an individualised solution.

The quantitative research reviewed on workplace conflict supported the view that both systemic and individual factors were involved in workplace conflict. Bentley et al. (2009) identified systemic factors played an important role in bullying in New Zealand workplaces. The CPP Global Human Capital Report (2008) identified that the worst 10% of organisations in nine countries experience average levels of conflict three times higher than the average. This can be calculated at four times the average if the average is calculated excluding the bottom 10%. Harris and Crothers (2010) achieved results in New Zealand that were consistent with the CPP figures. If workplace conflict is purely individual conflict in the workplace these results would not have occurred. This is because if workplace conflict is only individual then it can be expected that levels of workplace conflict in different organisations will be relatively consistent. For the bottom 10% of organisations to be experiencing average levels of conflict four times that of the top 90% indicates that internal systemic factors are largely responsible for the variance.

### **Why have so many conflict theorists denied systemic factors may have a role in conflict?**

The major difference between the results in this research and much of the theoretical literature is that these results identified the critical importance of systemic factors in workplace conflict while much of the theoretical literature overlooked systemic factors. Reflecting on this difference is therefore important in order to try to understand why it has occurred.

It is impossible to identify why so many conflict theorists have ignored or overlooked that systemic factors may play a key role in workplace conflict. However that this could have been simple oversight seems hard to believe. This is because for this to be the case the theorists would need to have done the following:

- 1- Ignore that conflict theory began as political theory of systemic conflict as it implies systemic factors may have an important role in conflict.
- 2- Ignore that workplace conflict has its origins as systemic conflict in the industrial revolution as it implies systemic factors may have an important role in workplace conflict.
- 3- Appear unaware that mainstream psychological and organisational research shows behaviour is influenced by systemic environmental factors as it implies systemic factors may play an important role in conflict behaviours.
- 4- Overlook that their implicit position that systemic factors are not important enough to warrant serious consideration in conflict is contradicted by either an overwhelming amount of, or all of the qualitative and quantitative research in this area.
- 5- Overlook that power is almost always a systemic issue and only describe it in ways that identify it as an individual issue.
- 6- Somehow manage to develop a broad consensus that systemic factors were so unimportant in conflict that they could be collectively overlooked.
- 7- Avoid actually either discussing or defending their position on this issue, even when evidence appears that applying solutions based on their theories in the workplace is ineffective.

This all seems a little problematic. It may be argued that in their review of conflict these theorists chose to focus on individual aspects. However the Milgram experiments identified how systemic factors influence behaviours (Benjamin & Simpson, 2009). This means they should be an important consideration in all conflict. Overlooking the role of systemic factors in conflict is a mistake as it means important potential causes of conflict are not considered.

The subtle influence of power provides a more compelling explanation for why these theorists have taken this position. As previously mentioned Foucault (1976) explains how power is only tolerable if it remains hidden. The powerful can therefore be expected to try to



individualise conflict as a way to keep power hidden. This means evidence that power is being used to focus attention away from the role of systemic factors in conflict is likely to be hard to find.

There is circumstantial evidence that power is being used to individualise conflict. If one assumes that power is being used to focus attention away from the role of systemic factors in conflict then it can be expected that there will be a pattern, with the same dynamic occurring in other areas of the social sciences that potentially threaten the positions of the powerful. In fact there is a pattern as the same dynamic is happening within social constructionism. Burr (2003) identifies a split within social constructionism where one group of theorists argue that social constructionism only comes from interpersonal communication between people and the other that both individual and systemic factors are involved. This is exactly the same split on exactly the same issue that is the source of division within conflict research.

The results from this research have not unveiled new thinking on conflict. They have instead identified thinking that has been overlooked or forgotten. They have presented a view of workplace conflict consistent with Weber (1948) and with the origins of workplace conflict in the industrial revolution which occurred between workers and employers over systemic issues (Jaffee, 2008). These results are also consistent with quantitative research on workplace conflict in New Zealand (Bentley et al. 2009) and globally (The CPP Global Human Capital Report, 2008). They have also revealed a view of workplace conflict consistent with mainstream research in psychology (Benjamin & Simpson, 2009). What the participants have identified about workplace conflict is that many modern conflict theorists have chosen to overlook the role of systemic factors workplace conflict rather than that systemic factors have a previously undiscovered role in workplace conflict.

### **A social constructionist perspective on these results**

While social constructionism does not appear to have a theory of workplace conflict, Foucault's (1976) comments on power indicate how social constructionists may interpret the results of this research. This is that the movement from overt sovereign power to disciplinary power that Foucault claims has occurred in Western societies has only partly extended to the

workplace. Due to discourses around workplace hierarchies both overt sovereign power and disciplinary power feature in many western workplaces. Discourses around human rights and democratic principles such as human equality mean many people will oppose the overt use of power and conflict will occur because of this. Thus levels of workplace conflict may be correlated to the discourses around overt use of sovereign power in individual workplaces.

That participant D was able to create a work environment that was viewed as harmonious by many people through relying on disciplinary power in a large financial institution is evidence that this approach can work. More research is obviously required to confirm this. However thanks to Foucault, social constructionism offers a potentially significant contribution to what can be done about problem levels of workplace conflict.

### **Applying the results from this research**

While the results from this research have identified a perspective on workplace conflict that differs from much of the literature, these results will not lead to a reduction in problem levels of workplace conflict by themselves. For this to occur they need to be applied. As the participants did not specifically identify how this should be done it requires thinking that is linked to the results but is not grounded in their answers. Applying the results of this research to the Bentley et al. (2009) report on workplace bullying in New Zealand provides an insight into how this could occur.

The grounded theory from this research is consistent with the reports' identification of systemic factors playing a key role in workplace bullying. However the theme identified in this thesis that the CEO, the key power individual in an organisation, is the key element affecting levels of conflict in organisations suggests problem levels of bullying are a likely symptom of a CEO who uses bullying tactics to govern. Thus researchers should be looking closely at how the CEOs govern organisations that are experiencing problem levels of bullying. If they find that these CEOs use power over others, behave disrespectfully to staff and manage autocratically in many organisations experiencing problems with bullying then this will partially validate the results from this research. It will mean the CEOs have created cultures of bullying in their organisations that may explain its prevalence. It will also mean

the CEO should be made responsible for the level and cost of destructive conflict in the organisation.

This is an application of the results from this research that could be used extensively. Levels of conflict could be measured and made a key performance indicator of the key power individual in an organisation, who is usually the CEO. Boards of directors could be directly sent the data on the levels of destructive conflict occurring within the organisations they govern as a means to evaluate the performance of the CEO. Should boards of directors begin to do this then it is likely that CEOs who abuse their power will be exposed. This will create a strong incentive for them to manage their power carefully.

The outcome of such an initiative could be a drop in levels of workplace conflict in organisations in New Zealand that underperform in this area. How dramatic this drop is likely to be is uncertain as it is likely to depend on the individual organisations' circumstances. However it is possible that in organisations experiencing excessive levels of destructive workplace conflict there could be a significant reduction in conflict levels through applying this approach.

A second major benefit from this initiative could be improved corporate profitability thanks to the savings generated. If most staff change their behaviours to reflect those of the chief executive then potentially a significant amount of the destructive conflict occurring in organisations experiencing problems in this area can be stopped when chief executives use their power respectfully.

The CPP Global Human Capital Report (2008) showed the levels of destructive conflict in the worst 10 % of organisations in the US in 2008 were four times as much as the average for the remaining 90%. In the literature review the costs of conflict incurred by organisations in the bottom 10% in the US were calculated at more than US\$20,000 per employee per annum. Costs of this magnitude constitute a threat to the survival of the organisations incurring them. The costs of destructive conflict in New Zealand have not been calculated. However Harris and Crothers (2010) have found that the amount of time lost to destructive conflict in New Zealand is comparable with US levels. This means it can be assumed the costs are likely to be broadly similar as well. It therefore appears possible, in an organisation with a poor record of destructive workplace conflict, to save many thousands of dollars per employee per annum by having a CEO who treats his staff with respect.

A potential problem with this solution is that it may be difficult to implement. This is because this solution makes CEOs accountable and in this respect places a limit on their power. Many CEOs are unlikely to support initiatives that limit their power. Furthermore CEOs who have a disrespectful approach can be expected to try to prevent levels of destructive conflict in their organisations being measured. However this problem does not weaken the strength of the theory.

Another potential problem is the situation where the CEO finds she or he has a group of destructive employees that do not reflect her or his behaviour and cannot be trained to change their behaviour. While it would be unfair to blame the CEO for the behaviours of such a group it is also true that the CEO has the power and resources to identify such employees and take the steps necessary to remedy this situation. It is also likely that such situations would only be short term as management in organisations with a focus on reducing levels of destructive conflict can be expected to quickly identify problem staff and take appropriate action to encourage them to change their behaviours.

A final potential problem with this recommendation is that while it is based on the data that came from the interviews the data seems a little simplistic. There may be other factors that contribute to levels of workplace conflict that were not identified in this research. This potential over simplification means that it would be useful to thoroughly test the results to see whether they can be replicated in other research.

### **Concluding comments**

When I began the interview process I assumed that the participants' views would be broadly in line with the views expressed in the literature on conflict resolution. This turned out to be incorrect as the interviews revealed thinking on workplace conflict resolution that was in many areas different from what was presented in the literature review. Taking a grounded theory approach means that when the interviews disagree with the literature then the researcher must contemplate why this is the case and develop a theory accordingly. The theory that problem levels of destructive conflict in organisations are often caused by systemic factors is the result of this process.

In the literature review it was concluded that workplace conflict is normal. It becomes a problem when there are excessive levels of destructive conflict occurring in an organisation (Pruitt, 2008). This means to solve the problem of workplace conflict does not require a solution that creates complete harmony, only one that addresses situations where excessive levels of destructive conflict are occurring.

Two initiatives were identified in the literature review that should help reduce excessive levels of destructive conflict. These are firstly that efforts at resolving conflict so there are win-win outcomes should be focussed at the early stage in the conflict, before it has become escalated and destructive. Secondly training was identified as a neglected yet potentially effective approach for reducing levels of conflict. I asked the participants about both of these areas in the interviews and received strong endorsement that both of these initiatives were important. The responses were so consistent that these initiatives emerged as themes during the open coding process. These additional approaches to workplace conflict are worth mentioning in this conclusion as workplace conflict is a complex issue. This complexity means that multiple approaches are likely to be needed to reduce excessive levels of destructive workplace conflict.

When I had completed the literature review I was not optimistic that much could be done to help address excessive levels of destructive workplace conflict. Early intervention in conflict and training did not address the disrespectful behaviour that was identified as the cause of so much destructive conflict. To address this disrespectful behaviour a large scale change in personality and behaviour seemed to be required that appeared unrealistic to expect.

The interviews gave me hope that this was achievable as they revealed that CEOs were considered to be responsible for much of the conflict behaviour of their staff in a much more direct manner than the literature reviewed suggested. This meant the large scale change in personality and behaviour, that seemed so unlikely following the literature review, could to some degree be achieved through CEOs talking and acting consistently and using their power respectfully. Holding CEOs personally accountable for levels of destructive conflict would also incentivise them to train staff in conflict resolution, so potentially the problem of training being neglected by organisations can be solved through this step. As the literature review identified the massive costs of destructive conflict the potential savings generated through applying these recommendations might be truly enormous. Potentially many thousands of

dollars per employee per year can be saved in organisations that are experiencing problem levels of destructive conflict.

Since this research was based on a small number of interviews in New Zealand it is problematic making generalisations about the results. Furthermore the results contradict a large body of conflict literature. However as these results are consistent with quantitative research on workplace conflict and mainstream organisational research there is significant credible supportive research that to some degree addresses this issue.

That the results have identified aspects of workplace conflict that are consistent with both quantitative research on workplace conflict and mainstream organisational research raises the issue of why so many of the conflict theorists reviewed in the literature review overlooked the evidence that systemic factors are an important aspect of workplace conflict. As this oversight is consistent with a number of views about how power protects itself through remaining invisible there is circumstantial evidence indicating that this oversight occurred due to the subtle influence of power. However in chapters two and four numerous oversights were identified in the work of many of the conflict theorists reviewed. This indicates it is also possible, although unlikely, that this oversight was simply the result of human fallibility.

Foucault's (1976) identification of disciplinary power and the limited evidence that harmonious workplaces can be achieved through managing using disciplinary power are notable. They indicate that there is a potentially important contribution to addressing problem levels of workplace conflict offered by social constructionism. It would be interesting to conduct social constructionist research to explore this further.

The results reveal some interesting new possible explanations for destructive workplace conflict. It would be useful to conduct more qualitative and quantitative research to further explore the themes and theories that emerged from this research.

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## Appendix 1

### Questions for Semi Structured Interviews

The interview process will seek to identify narratives showing both how conflict in a New Zealand workplace has been successfully and unsuccessfully managed. Questions will include:

- How would you define conflict?
- In your experience what factors need to be present for conflict to be resolved so there is a win-win outcome?
- In your experience how often are win-win outcomes achieved. Why do you think this is?
- Using an example please describe the steps you go through when you are dealing with a (workplace) conflict
- How do you think the issue of power affects workplace conflict
- What factors do you think cause variations in the levels of conflict occurring within different organisations?
- How would you describe the most harmonious workplace you have encountered and what elements do you believe were significant contributors to the organisational culture?
- What do you think the factors are that lead to systemic (cf interpersonal) conflict in organisations?
- In your view what are the strengths and weaknesses of using mediation to deal with workplace conflict?
- What sort of people do you think should be recruited in order to create a harmonious workplace?
- In your opinion what role does gender play in conflict behaviour and how does this impact on workplace conflict?
- What effect do you think culture has on conflict behaviour and how does this impact on workplace conflict?
- What do you think of workplace conflict management systems?
- How important do you think training (in conflict resolution) is and why?

## **Appendix 2**

### **Dealing with conflict in New Zealand workplaces**

**Andrew Harris and Charles Crothers**

**Department of Social Sciences, AUT**

**April 2010.**

#### **Aim and Rationale**

**The aim of this project was to provide accurate information on workplace conflict in New Zealand**

**The rationale for this project is that a deeper understanding of workplace conflict will enable strategies to be developed to help combat this problem. If The CPP Global Human Capital Report (2008) US figures are applied proportionately to New Zealand it suggests the costs to the New Zealand economy each year from workplace conflict are in the billions and this is just in terms of productive time lost . The total cost of workplace conflict in New Zealand each year could be much more than this.**

#### **Literature Review and Background**

**This research will be based on the Masters and Albright (2002) definition of conflict as occurring wherever disagreement occurs that is felt by at least one of the parties. This definition normalises conflict, addresses the different ways to differentiate conflict and allows workplace conflict to be looked at in the context of general conflict. De Dreu and Gelfand (2008) add that implicit in this definition is that conflict can either be manifest or latent as when one party feels disagreement conflict is latent. While workplace conflict is a significant problem in its own right the literature suggests it is part of interpersonal conflict rather than being a separate type of conflict. This position is slightly contentious as Kolb (2008) identified how organizations try to individualize conflicts in order to safeguard existing power systems.**

**The processes available to deal with conflict are covered by the acronym ADR (Lulofs & Cahn, 2000, Cahn & Abigail ,2007). However ADR processes dealing with workplace**

conflict have not been particularly effective, as according to Masters and Albright (2002) levels of workplace conflict are rising. The reason for this is that it is unrealistic to expect ADR processes that operate as a hospital at the bottom of the cliff repairing destructive conflicts to reduce the numbers falling off the top.

Quantitative research on workplace conflict occurred in May 2008 when CPP Inc. conducted a research project looking at the issue of workplace conflict. They questioned 5,000 full time employees in nine countries in Europe and the Americas. The CPP Global Human Capital Report (2008) results showed every employee in these nine countries spends on average 2.1 hours each week dealing with conflict. While the value of this time was not calculated for every country it was calculated in the US. The CPP Global Human Capital Report (2008) found that in the US the annual cost of conflict was US\$359,000,000,000. It should also be appreciated that cost of time lost to conflict represents only part of the cost of workplace conflict. McCrindle (2004) contends that there are both measurable and immeasurable costs that should also be considered. Measurable costs include recruitment costs, staff turnover and training costs, absentee costs, productivity costs and legal costs. Immeasurable costs include lost motivation, damage to the relationship between employers and employees and damage to the relationship between a company and its customers. Furthermore Spector and Bruk-Lee (2008) claim the impact of destructive workplace conflict goes even further than the areas identified by McCrindle (2004). It also has serious effects on employee health because of the stress it causes. "Conflict has also been shown to be associated with employee depression, negative emotional states, psychosomatic complaints, life dissatisfaction, burnout and psychiatric morbidity" (Spector & Bruk-Lee, 2008 p. 267). De Frank and Ivancevich (1998) estimate that in 1998 the annual cost of work stress borne by organisations in the USA was

over US\$200 billion. This figure covers staff turnover, health care costs and productivity. Their research suggests that most of this expense can be attributed to escalated workplace conflict.

What makes the workplace such a 'ripe breeding ground' for conflict is that there are more sources of conflict in the workplace than in most other areas of our lives. Masters and Albright (2002) explain that in the workplace people are exposed to potential conflicts from environmental, workplace and organisational sources as well as the individual sources of conflict that are predominant in most other aspects of our lives. The CPP Global Human Capital Report (2008) shows that the main causes of workplace

conflict are personality clashes and warring egos (identified as the primary cause of conflict by 49% of respondents) followed by stress (34%). This demonstrates that workplace conflict to a large degree involves the same issues that arise in conflict in other social environments.

The CPP Global Human Capital report (2008) found that “Training is the biggest driver for high-quality outcomes from conflict” (CPP Global Human Capital report, 2008 p.3.). In addition to this the report found that 95% of the respondents who had received training agreed that the training they had received had helped them in some way. Furthermore a staggering 58% of those respondents that received training said they now looked for win-win outcomes from conflict. These figures demonstrate that training is highly effective as a tool for dealing with workplace conflict and makes a very compelling argument that it should be widely used. Furthermore the 58% of respondents that said that they now look for win-win outcomes from conflict indicates that training is highly effective in changing staff attitudes about conflict.

However despite the proven effectiveness of training most staff are not trained in conflict resolution. The CPP Global Human Capital report (2008) results showed that 56% of respondents had received no training in conflict resolution at all. Of the 44% of the survey that had received training, 13% had attended an external course, 12% had received some training in this area as part of leadership development and the rest relied on informal peer advice. The report said that 7% of those surveyed had sought help from the Internet on how to manage conflict. The report speculated that this was done in “desperation” at the lack of training that staff had received (CPP Global Human Capital report, 2008, p.14). This general lack of training was described as “lamentable” (CPP Global Human Capital report, 2008, p.15). With the large potential benefits to the bottom line that would result from having more harmonious workplaces together with the high levels of benefit staff report from receiving basic training in this area, the reasons for training staff in how to manage conflict constructively are so strong that this essay agrees with the CPP Global Human Capital report (2008), that the current situation where most staff receive no training in conflict resolution is regrettable.

The CPP Global Human Capital report (2008) featured individual reports on nine countries; Germany, USA, UK, Brazil, Denmark, France, Ireland, Belgium and the Netherlands. The question that this report raised for the researcher was how would New Zealand compare with these countries if a similar study was done here? This led to my contacting CPP and asking if it was possible to use the same questionnaire in New Zealand as they had used for their report. As CPP will only give a sample containing

some of the questions an apples with apples comparison with the data in their report is not possible.

## **Commentary:**

### **The Research Process**

The first month was spent developing the online questionnaire. This was then placed on SurveyMonkey . The next step in the process was recruiting respondents. I began this phase through contacting the HR departments of a number of large organisations. This was not a successful strategy as cold calling Companies and asking them to reveal the details of their internal problems resulted in stonewalling and avoidance. A new strategy was needed and so I decided to contact a number of large organisations that might be interested in promoting this research to their corporate clients. The first two I chose were OCG, a major recruitment company and the Employers and Manufacturers Association (EMA). OCG asked me to meet with them following this meeting agreed to support this research. I was then invited back to OCG to brief the consultants and delivered a Powerpoint presentation to 20 consultants in January. There was an enthusiastic response and consultants then began contacting HR managers at OCG's top 100 clients. The process was that the consultant spoke with the HR managers and then gave me their details so that I could follow up. While this seemed relatively straight forward the reality was that it was a major challenge contacting the referred HR managers. I eventually managed to contact most of the HR managers referred to me and of these four were sufficiently interested to ask me to set up a customized link to SurveyMonkey so that the results from their organisations could be identified and they could use them as a sort of conflict audit. Disappointingly after promising they would support the research only one of these four HR managers managed to get staff to complete the survey.

The EMA have championed the cause of addressing workplace conflict and so were very interested in this research project. They were sufficiently excited about this research to include it in the agenda for their annual road show. This was attended by HR managers from more than 2000 organisations. I attended one of these road shows, at the Bruce Mason centre on the North Shore and was introduced to the audience and saw that there was a strong turnout.



With this level of support and enthusiasm from such large organisations I was hopeful that there would be a high level of response to the online questionnaire. However this was not the case as a modest 70 responses were all that were received. I believe the reasons for this were a combination of overworked HR managers without the time to actually support this research and a reluctance from many organisations to want to air their dirty conflict laundry. The risks involved in supporting this research were obviously larger than the perceived benefits. Some of the HR managers were very excited about this research as they were interested in using workplace harmony as a competitive tool and so had a natural interest. I was able to interview these managers as part of the qualitative research for my thesis.

## Survey Results

The sample comprises 2/3rds from a larger group and a third from a smaller.

Response declined as respondents worked there way through the questionnaire. All 70 respondents answered the beginning demographic questions but by the time the last few questions were reached numbers were down to 50 (with the very last section only covered those who had been trained). Very few open-ended responses were completed.

	Frequency	Percent
Valid Larger group	49	70.0
Smaller group	21	30.0
Total	70	100.0

## Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
What level of the organisation do you work in?	70	1	4	2.13	1.203

How long have you worked for the organisation that you currently work for? 70 1  
5 3.49 1.576

Gender 69 1 2 1.52 .503

Age Group 70 2 6 3.87 1.141

What size organisation do you work for? 69 1 6 3.41 1.743

What industry is the organisation that you work for in? 70 1 10 7.36  
3.341

Ethnicity 69 1 5 1.61 1.320

In a typical day I spend the following amount of time involved in disagreements and conflicts 64 1 5 1.66 .930

In a typical day I spend the following amount of time feeling disagreement with others' decisions or actions 64 1 5 1.81 1.022

10. How do you feel about your work ? 64 1 5 2.23 .955

11 What contributes to your attitude to work: Frustration with mgt 50 1 4  
2.94 .890

Frustration with processes 51 1 4 2.27 .850

Feeling under informed 51 1 4 1.98 .761

Feeling disempowered 50 1 4 2.34 1.002

Not being listened to 50 1 4 2.44 1.053

Feeling overworked 50 1 4 2.58 .906

Feeling underpaid 50 1 4 2.84 .866

Feeling underutilised 48 1 4 2.79 .922

Poor handling of conflict 51 1 4 2.53 1.027

Other 50 1 4 2.78 .996

Other spec 0

12 How often do you do you think the following types of conflict occur at your work?  
Between co-workers at the same level 61 1 4 3.28 .915

Between managers and those they manage 59 1 4 3.25 .883

Between managers at the same level 58 1 4 3.43 .752

**13 How often do you observe conflicts due to the following? Personality clashes 60**

1	4	2.78	1.209		
Stress	60	1	4	2.62	1.180
Clashes of values	60	1	4	3.07	1.148
Poor management	60	1	4	2.57	1.125
Dishonesty	59	1	4	3.63	.740
Bullying	60	1	4	3.58	.787
Discrimination	60	1	4	3.82	.596
Gender - Racial	59	1	4	3.85	.551

**14 Have you experienced the following conflict behaviours? Conflicts escalating 60**

1	5	3.68	1.097		
Staff away "sick"	61	1	5	3.48	1.163
Bullying	59	1	5	4.20	.943
Conflict between departments	59	1	5	3.17	1.262
Staff resign	59	1	5	3.76	.817
Projects fail	58	1	5	3.79	.874
Staff transfers	60	3	5	4.48	.596
Firings	59	3	5	4.46	.567
Staff avoiding each other	59	1	5	3.37	1.202

**Other 0**

**15 How much of the conflict you experience at your work is caused by one or more negative or trouble making people 61 1 5 3.07 1.401**

**16 When you observe conflict how often do you think it is successfully resolved so that both sides are happy with the 56 1 6 3.11 1.246**

**17 Who do you think should be responsible for dealing with conflict at your work?**

Everyone	53	1	4	1.64	.857
Line managers	48	1	4	1.81	.915
Middle managers	48	1	4	1.67	.859

Those involved	50	1	3	1.24	.476
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Senior managers	50	1	4	1.40	.670
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Conflict professionals	48	1	4	2.27	.917
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**18 How important do you think the following would be in helping deal with conflict?**

Better Senior Management leadership	51	1	4	1.61	.827
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Better Middle management leadership	52	1	4	1.62	.844
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Better Line Manager Leadership	51	1	4	1.98	1.049
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Better defined roles	51	1	4	1.73	.827
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Better conflict management services	51	1	4	2.08	.913
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Addressing problems earlier	54	1	4	1.70	.792
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Better communication channels	53	1	4	1.38	.790
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Other	53	1	4	1.34	.758
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Other (spec) 0

19 How well do you think the following handle conflict	Senior Management	54	1	5	2.56	1.192
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Middle Management	51	1	5	2.90	1.100
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Line Management	50	1	5	3.18	1.173
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Human Resources	51	1	5	3.41	1.359
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Company dispute management systems	50	1	5	3.78	1.250
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20 How do you feel following conflict? Angry and frustrated	51	1	4	2.49	.880
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Demotivated	52	1	4	2.60	1.034
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Stressed	51	1	4	2.47	.758
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Nothing	49	2	4	3.53	.544
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Excited	52	2	4	3.67	.617
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Confident	53	1	4	3.25	.939
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Energised	52	1	4	3.46	.699
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Other 0

**21 How well do you think you do at resolving workplace conflicts? 54 1 5**  
**2.81 .848**

**22 In your experience with workplace conflicts that you have been involved in how often do the following happen? Problem does 52 1 5 3.12 1.003**

**Resentment increases 53 1 5 2.98 1.101**

**Poorer understanding 51 1 5 3.06 1.139**

**Damaged relationships 52 1 5 2.94 1.074**

**Poorer performance 53 1 5 3.17 1.122**

**Better understanding 53 1 5 2.96 1.073**

**Improved relationships 23 1 5 3.48 1.082**

**Better performance 54 1 5 3.22 1.093**

**Better team environment 22 1 5 3.73 1.120**

**Problem gets resolved 53 1 5 3.09 1.061**

**V95 40 1 5 3.00 1.086**

**V96 23 1 5 2.65 1.191**

**V97 52 1 5 2.38 1.123**

**23 How much do you agree with the following statements about how you handle workplace conflicts now rather than earlier in: they get to me less 51 1 3**  
**2.49 .644**

**I am more proactive 51 1 3 1.76 .710**

**I am less likely to cause a fuss 52 1 3 1.56 .669**

**I now seek advice from colleagues 51 1 3 1.96 .747**

**I now seek advice from people outside work 51 1 3 1.69 .707**

**I appreciate the value of conflict more 39 1 3 1.97 .707**

**I have learned not to win 39 1 3 1.97 .743**

**Other 52 1 4 2.46 .999**

**24 How often have you received training in managing conflict from the following? Part of management training 51 1 4 3.27 .940**

Part of a leadership course	52	1	4	3.38	.844
External course in conflict management	51	1	4	3.57	.806
Informal training from other staff	51	1	4	3.45	.856
Training from a line manager	51	1	4	3.59	.853
Mediation course	52	2	4	3.46	.828
Formal internal course on conflict management	38	2	4	3.76	.634
Course outside work	38	2	4	3.53	.725
Other	45	1	4	3.09	.996

25 If you received conflict training how much do you agree with the following statements about how it made you feel? I felt 39 1 3 1.62 .673

I felt more determined to avoid conflict 39 1 3 2.36 .668

It made no difference 36 1 3 2.58 .649

It helped me give in more gracefully 30 1 3 2.43 .626

It helped me get what I want from conflict situations 28 1 3 2.07  
.813

It helped me get more positive outcomes for both parties 30 1 3  
1.53 .730

Valid N (listwise) 0

#### Respondent details. Questions 1-7

The first section of the online questionnaire contained seven questions relating to the gender, ethnicity, age group, work experience, employment status, size of organization and industry sector the respondents are employed in. The results from this section were predictable: There was a 50/50 split between male and female respondents, an even spread of work experience and age groups and a mix of industry sectors. The responses

to the questions regarding the size of employer organisation showed around 30% of respondents worked for organisations with between 20 and 50 staff and 20% worked for organisations with more than 1000 staff. Ethnicity was also relatively predictable with 80% of respondents being European.

#### Count Column N %

What level of the organisation do you work in? General staff level 34 48.6%

Line manager level 5 7.1%

Middle manager level 19 27.1%

Senior manager level 12 17.1%

How long have you worked for the organisation that you currently work for? 1-2 years 14 20.0%

2-3 years 6 8.6%

3-4 years 11 15.7%

4-5 years 10 14.3%

5 29 41.4%

Gender Male 33 47.8%

Female 36 52.2%

Age Group Under 20 0 .0%

20-29 8 11.4%

30-39 21 30.0%

40-49 18 25.7%

50-59 18 25.7%

60-69 5 7.1%

70+ 0 .0%

What size organisation do you work for? 0-19 staff 9 13.0%

20-49 staff 21 30.4%

50-99 staff 4 5.8%

100-499 staff	18	26.1%
500-999 staff	2	2.9%
1000 or more staff	15	21.7%

What industry is the organisation that you work for in? Financial services 10  
14.3%

Manufacturing	0	.0%
Education	0	.0%
Health	5	7.1%
Transport	6	8.6%
Science and Technology	7	10.0%
Primary Industry	0	.0%
Tourism	0	.0%
State Owned	7	10.0%
Other	35	50.0%

Ethnicity	European	54	78.3%
	Maori	5	7.2%
	Pacifica	0	.0%
	Asian	3	4.3%
	Other	7	10.1%

#### Time spent in conflict. Questions 8 and 9

This section attempted to measure the time staff spent both actually involved in manifest conflict and in latent conflict. Latent conflict is when staff feel disagreement with something that has occurred in the workplace but this has not manifested into actual conflict. These questions were motivated by the CPP Global Human Services Report (2008) that found that on average staff in nine countries spent 2.1 hours each week involved in actual conflict. The CPP figures showed that the bottom 10% of respondents reported six hours a week or more of manifest destructive conflict. Results



were broadly in line with the CPP figures at the extreme end as 8% of respondents reported 5 hours a week or more involved in conflict. At the healthy end of the scale the New Zealand figures were slightly better than the CPP figures. 50% of respondents reported 0-50 minutes of destructive conflict each week and 30% reported 50-150 minutes.

The CPP survey did not cover latent conflict and so the New Zealand figures cannot be compared with the CPP figures on this issue. However the New Zealand figures indicate that similar amounts of time are spent on latent conflict as are spent on actual conflict. 44% of respondents reported 0-50 minutes of latent conflict each week compared with 50% reporting 0-50 minutes of actual conflict. 44% also reported 50-150 minutes of latent conflict each week compared with 30% reporting 50-150 minutes of actual conflict. While the survey size is small and this impacts reliability these results suggest that a similar amount of latent conflict occurs in organisations to actual conflict. The implications of this are that the CPP report may have understated time lost to conflict in their report by 50%. Further research is required as the survey size is small. However if true this means the cost of time lost in the USA to workplace conflict is approximately \$720 billion each year.

	Less than 10 minutes	10-29 Minutes	30-59 Minutes	1-2 Hours	2-4 Hours
	4-6 Hours	6-8 Hours			
Row N %	Row N %	Row N %	Row N %	Row N %	Row N %
Row N %					

In a typical day I spend the following amount of time involved in disagreements and conflicts      54.7% 34.4% 3.1% 6.2% 1.6% .0% .0%

In a typical day I spend the following amount of time feeling disagreement with others' decisions or actions      45.3% 40.6% 6.2% 3.1% 4.7% .0% .0%

#### **Job Satisfaction. Questions 10 and 11**

Responses indicated high levels of job satisfaction. 70% reported they were either fulfilled or generally happy with their work and 17% reported they felt neutral about their work. From the 8% who were unhappy with their work the three main reasons they gave were frustration with processes, feeling under-informed and feeling disempowered.

**Count Column N %**

<b>Q.10. How do you feel about your work ?</b>	<b>Fulfilled</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>20.3%</b>
<b>Generally happy</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>50.0%</b>	
<b>Neutral</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>17.2%</b>	
<b>Somewhat dissatisfied</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>10.9%</b>	
<b>Unhappy</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1.6%</b>	

**Q11 Major cause Reasonable amount Not much Not at all**

	<b>Row N %</b>	<b>Row N %</b>	<b>Row N %</b>	<b>Row N %</b>
<b>Frustration with mgt</b>	<b>17.6%</b>	<b>45.1%</b>	<b>29.4%</b>	<b>7.8%</b>
<b>Frustration with processes</b>	<b>27.5%</b>	<b>49.0%</b>	<b>21.6%</b>	<b>2.0%</b>
<b>Feeling under informed</b>	<b>20.0%</b>	<b>44.0%</b>	<b>18.0%</b>	<b>18.0%</b>
<b>Feeling disempowered</b>	<b>24.0%</b>	<b>26.0%</b>	<b>32.0%</b>	<b>18.0%</b>
<b>Not being listened to</b>	<b>14.0%</b>	<b>28.0%</b>	<b>44.0%</b>	<b>14.0%</b>
<b>Feeling overworked</b>	<b>6.0%</b>	<b>28.0%</b>	<b>42.0%</b>	<b>24.0%</b>
<b>Feeling underpaid</b>	<b>6.2%</b>	<b>35.4%</b>	<b>31.2%</b>	<b>27.1%</b>
<b>Feeling underutilised</b>	<b>17.6%</b>	<b>33.3%</b>	<b>27.5%</b>	<b>21.6%</b>
<b>Poor handling of conflict</b>	<b>14.0%</b>	<b>20.0%</b>	<b>40.0%</b>	<b>26.0%</b>

**Where conflict occurs in organisations. Question 12**

The responses to this question did not identify any particular level in organisations that had significantly more conflict than the rest. Approximately half reported regular, frequent or continual conflict occurring at every level.

	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Somewhat agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Not applicable</b>
	<b>Row N %</b>	<b>Row N %</b>	<b>Row N %</b>	<b>Row N %</b>
<b>Line managers</b>	<b>43.8%</b>	<b>39.6%</b>	<b>8.3%</b>	<b>8.3%</b>

<b>Middle managers</b>	<b>52.1%</b>	<b>35.4%</b>	<b>6.2%</b>	<b>6.2%</b>
<b>Those involved</b>	<b>78.0%</b>	<b>20.0%</b>	<b>2.0%</b>	<b>.0%</b>
<b>Senior managers</b>	<b>68.0%</b>	<b>26.0%</b>	<b>4.0%</b>	<b>2.0%</b>
<b>Conflict professionals</b>	<b>18.8%</b>	<b>47.9%</b>	<b>20.8%</b>	<b>12.5%</b>

### **Causes of conflict. Question 13**

The CPP Global Human Services Report (2008) identified warring egos and stress as the two main causes of workplace conflict. The New Zealand research project approached this issue differently to CPP as the causes were not ranked by respondents. Instead the frequency of conflict generated by each cause was measured. The four causes that generated the most daily and weekly conflict were stress (48%), poor management (47%), personality clashes (45%) and clashes of values (32%). Gender was not reported as being a significant cause of conflict with 91% reporting it was rare for it to be a factor.

	<b>Daily</b>	<b>Weekly</b>	<b>Monthly</b>	<b>Seldom</b>
	<b>Row N %</b>	<b>Row N %</b>	<b>Row N %</b>	<b>Row N %</b>
<b>Clashes of values</b>	<b>15.0%</b>	<b>16.7%</b>	<b>15.0%</b>	<b>53.3%</b>
<b>Personality clashes</b>	<b>20.0%</b>	<b>25.0%</b>	<b>11.7%</b>	<b>43.3%</b>
<b>Stress</b>	<b>23.3%</b>	<b>25.0%</b>	<b>18.3%</b>	<b>33.3%</b>
<b>Poor management</b>	<b>23.3%</b>	<b>23.3%</b>	<b>26.7%</b>	<b>26.7%</b>
<b>Dishonesty</b>	<b>3.4%</b>	<b>5.1%</b>	<b>16.9%</b>	<b>74.6%</b>
<b>Bullying</b>	<b>3.3%</b>	<b>8.3%</b>	<b>15.0%</b>	<b>73.3%</b>
<b>Discrimination</b>	<b>1.7%</b>	<b>5.0%</b>	<b>3.3%</b>	<b>90.0%</b>
<b>Gender - Racial</b>	<b>1.7%</b>	<b>3.4%</b>	<b>3.4%</b>	<b>91.5%</b>

### **Negative Conflict Behaviours. Question 14.**

The CPP Global Human Services Report (2008) identified 9% of respondents as having witnessed conflict leading a project failing, 48% as having seen people take time off sick due to conflict and 18% as having witnessed people resign because of conflict. The New Zealand research looked to measure both the negative consequences of conflict as well as frequencies. The results indicate that conflict escalation is relatively rare as only 23% of respondents reported witnessing this either weekly or monthly. However 35% of respondents reported witnessing staff taking time off sick due to conflict either weekly or monthly, 28% reported staff resigning due to conflict either weekly or monthly and 21% reported they had witnessed projects failing weekly or monthly due to conflict. The most often witnessed response to conflict was people avoiding each other as 40% of respondents claimed this occurred either daily, weekly or monthly as a response to conflict. This indicates that New Zealanders may be poor at resolving conflicts.

**Table 1**

	daily	weekly	monthly	seldom	never
	Row N %	Row N %	Row N %	Row N %	Row N %
Have you experienced the following conflict behaviours?					
Conflicts escalating	3.3%	16.7%	10.0%	48.3%	21.7%
Staff away "sick"	6.6%	14.8%	23.0%	36.1%	19.7%
Bullying	1.7%	6.8%	5.1%	42.4%	44.1%
Conflict between departments			10.2%	23.7%	22.0%
Staff resign	1.7%	5.1%	22.0%	57.6%	13.6%
Projects fail	3.4%	5.2%	13.8%	63.8%	13.8%
Staff transfers		.0%	.0%	5.0%	41.7%
Firings	.0%	.0%	3.4%	47.5%	49.2%
Staff avoiding each other		10.2%	13.6%	20.3%	40.7%
				15.3%	

#### **Impact of negative staff. Question 15**

Responses to this question showed that troublemakers are found in most but not all organisations, 80 % responded that they work with negative people. Of those that work with negative people 70% responded that the negative people are responsible for half or more of the conflict that occurs in their workplace. This indicates that negative people are a significant source of workplace conflict in New Zealand.

**Table 1**

	Almost all negative, trouble making people at my work	Much of it	Around half	Not much of it	There are no	Other please specify
	Row N %	Row N %	Row N %	Row N %	Row N %	Row N %
15 How much of the conflict you experience at your work is caused by one or more negative or trouble making people	18.0%	19.7%	19.7%	23.0%	19.7%	.0%

#### Success rates when conflict occurs: Question 16

Responses indicated that when conflict occurred it was either always or usually resolved so both sides were happy with the outcome around 40% of the time.

**Table 1**

	Always Never	Usually	About half the time	Occasionally	Almost	never
	Row N %	Row N %	Row N %	Row N %	Row N %	Row N %
16 When you observe conflict how often do you think it is successfully resolved so that both sides are happy with the	8.9%	30.4%	14.3%	35.7%	8.9%	1.8%

#### Who should be responsible for dealing with conflict? Question 17

83% surveyed agreed or somewhat agreed that everyone involved should be responsible for resolving conflicts. What was a little unexpected was that only 19% fully agreed that conflict professionals should be involved in resolving their workplace conflicts. This indicates that the concept of using third party neutrals to help with workplace conflict is not popular in New Zealand.

	Agree	Somewhat agree	Disagree	Not applicable
	Row N %	Row N %	Row N %	Row N %
Everyone	56.6%		26.4%	13.2% 3.8%
Line managers	43.8%	39.6%	8.3%	8.3%
Middle managers	52.1%	35.4%	6.2%	6.2%
Those involved	78.0%	20.0%	2.0%	.0%
Senior managers	68.0%	26.0%	4.0%	2.0%
Conflict professionals	18.8%	47.9%	20.8%	12.5%

#### What would help reduce the levels of conflict? Question 18

The CPP (2008) report identified management behaviours such as informal conversations with staff (42% support), management acting as mediators (40% support) and providing clearer guidelines (40% support) as the best ways to improve levels of conflict. The New Zealand research identified management taking earlier action. 77% of respondents agreed that this was very important. 75% of respondents also believed better communication was very important to reduce conflict levels. The other main actions that respondents reported as very important in reducing levels of conflict were better senior management (55%), and staff training in conflict management (44%).

	Very	Moderately	Unimportant	NA
	Row N %	Row N %	Row N %	Row N %
How important do you think the following would be in helping deal with conflict?				
Better Senior Management leadership	54.9%	35.3%	3.9%	5.9%
Better Middle management leadership	53.8%	38.5%	.0%	7.7%

Better Line Manager Leadership	39.2%	39.2%	5.9%	15.7%
Better defined roles	45.1%	43.1%	5.9%	5.9%
Better conflict management services	27.5%	47.1%	15.7%	9.8%
Training staff in conflict management	44.4%	46.3%	3.7%	5.6%
Better communication channels	75.5%	17.0%	1.9%	5.7%
Addressing problems earlier	77.4%	17.0%	.0%	5.7%

#### How well do management handle conflict? Question 19.

Respondents were asked to rate how well various levels of management, Human resources and dispute management systems dealt with conflict. Results were that senior management were viewed by 70% respondents as handling conflict either very well or well. This compares with middle management (48%), line management (36%), Human Resources (24%) and dispute management systems (23%).

	Very well	Ok	Neutral	Badly	Not applicable
	Row N %	Row N %	Row N %	Row N %	Row N %
19 How well do you think the following handle conflict Senior Management	18.5%				
	40.7%	13.0%	22.2%	5.6%	
Middle Management	5.9%	39.2%	21.6%	25.5%	7.8%
Line Management	4.0%	30.0%	28.0%	20.0%	18.0%
Human Resources	11.8%	13.7%	25.5%	19.6%	29.4%
Company dispute management systems	2.0%	18.0%	24.0%	12.0%	44.0%

#### Feelings after conflict. Question 20.

Responses indicated that once conflict had occurred there was approximately three times the likelihood that those involved would feel negative about the experience as

positive. This is consistent with the literature that says that most people have a negative view of conflict.

	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
	Row N %	Row N %	Row N %	Row N %
How do you feel following conflict?				
Angry and frustrated	13.7%	35.3%	39.2%	11.8%
Demotivated	17.3%	28.8%	30.8%	23.1%
Stressed	9.8%	39.2%	45.1%	5.9%
Nothing	.0%	2.0%	42.9%	55.1%
Excited	.0%	7.7%	17.3%	75.0%
Confident	7.5%	11.3%	30.2%	50.9%
Energised	1.9%	5.8%	36.5%	55.8%

#### How well respondents think they do at handling conflict. Question 21

Given the literature that says we have overly optimistic views of our own skills and abilities it was to be expected that most people would think they handled conflict well. However the results showed that only 34% rated there performance as either great or good. 54 % said they did their best and 4% said they found it difficult or tried to avoid dealing with it.

I do a great job	I do a good job	I do my best	I find it difficult	I
try to avoid doing this				
Row N %	Row N %	Row N %	Row N %	Row N %



**21 How well do you think you do at resolving workplace conflicts?      3.7%   29.6%  
53.7% 7.4%   5.6%**

**What usually happens when conflict occurs. Question 22.**

**Respondents indicated that problems were not usually resolved following conflict. Only 28% of respondents agreed that successful resolution always or 38% said it was either rarely or never resolved. This indicates that it is unusual for workplace conflicts to be resolved in New Zealand .**

**Table 1**

	<b>Almost always</b>	<b>usually</b>	<b>50-50</b>	<b>rarely</b>	<b>never</b>
	<b>Row N %</b>	<b>Row N %</b>	<b>Row N %</b>	<b>Row N %</b>	<b>Row N %</b>
<b>22 In your experience with workplace conflicts that you have been involved in how often do the following happen? Problem does</b>					
<b>Problem does not get resolved</b>	<b>3.8%</b>	<b>25.0%</b>	<b>34.6%</b>	<b>28.8%</b>	<b>7.7%</b>
<b>Resentment increases</b>	<b>5.7%</b>	<b>34.0%</b>	<b>26.4%</b>	<b>24.5%</b>	<b>9.4%</b>
<b>Poorer understanding</b>	<b>7.8%</b>	<b>27.5%</b>	<b>25.5%</b>	<b>29.4%</b>	<b>9.8%</b>
<b>Damaged relationships</b>	<b>7.7%</b>	<b>28.8%</b>	<b>32.7%</b>	<b>23.1%</b>	<b>7.7%</b>
<b>Poorer performance</b>	<b>7.5%</b>	<b>20.8%</b>	<b>30.2%</b>	<b>30.2%</b>	<b>11.3%</b>
<b>Better understanding</b>	<b>7.5%</b>	<b>26.4%</b>	<b>37.7%</b>	<b>18.9%</b>	<b>9.4%</b>
<b>Improved relationships</b>	<b>4.3%</b>	<b>13.0%</b>	<b>30.4%</b>	<b>34.8%</b>	<b>17.4%</b>
<b>Better performance</b>	<b>7.4%</b>	<b>18.5%</b>	<b>27.8%</b>	<b>37.0%</b>	<b>9.3%</b>
<b>Better team environment</b>	<b>4.5%</b>	<b>9.1%</b>	<b>22.7%</b>	<b>36.4%</b>	<b>27.3%</b>
<b>Problem gets resolved</b>	<b>7.5%</b>	<b>20.8%</b>	<b>34.0%</b>	<b>30.2%</b>	<b>7.5%</b>

**How do you handle workplace conflict differently compared with earlier in your career? Question 23**

There was a significant difference between the CPP (2008) results and the New Zealand results regarding this question. 84% of New Zealand respondents said they agreed or somewhat agreed that they were now more proactive. This also compares favourably with the CPP (2008) figures showing only 18% now acted proactively. Other figures where New Zealand results were relatively better than the CPP (2008) results were in the area of seeking help with conflict. In New Zealand 86% agreed or somewhat agreed that they seek help outside work and 74% seek it from colleagues. The comparable CPP (2008) figures were 7% and 12 % respectively.

Where the New Zealand figures were worse than the international figures was in respect to the numbers of respondents who claim they have learned to lose conflicts. In New Zealand 74% of respondents either agreed completely or partially that they had learned to lose in conflict situations. This compares with 21% in the CPP (2008) survey. As the literature says win-lose outcomes are actually destructive this indicates that there are still some deep seated problems with the way New Zealanders are dealing with conflict in the workplace.

	Agree	Somewhat agree	Disagree
	Row N %	Row N %	Row N %
23 How much do you agree with the following statements about how you handle workplace conflicts now rather than earlier in your career			
They get to me less	7.8%	35.3%	56.9%
They affect me the same	11.1%	36.1%	52.8%
I am more proactive	39.2%	45.1%	15.7%
I am less likely to cause a fuss	53.8%	36.5%	9.6%
I now seek advice from colleagues	29.4%	45.1%	25.5%
I now seek advice from people outside work	45.1%	41.2%	13.7%
I appreciate the value of conflict more	25.6%	51.3%	23.1%
I have learned not to win	28.2%	46.2%	25.6%

Training Questions 24 and 25

The CPP Global Human Services Report (2008) showed that 56% of staff surveyed globally had never received any training in conflict management. The New Zealand figures were almost identical as 54% of staff had never received any training in conflict management. There was a similar consistency with feelings about whether conflict training was beneficial as both the CPP report and the New Zealand results showed very high levels of agreement that the training was beneficial. In New Zealand over 80% agreed the training made a difference.

	Frequently	More than once	Once	Never
	Row N %	Row N %	Row N %	Row N %
How often have you received training in managing conflict from the following?				
Part of management training	2.0%	27.5%	11.8%	58.8%
Part of a leadership course	1.9%	17.3%	21.2%	59.6%
External course in conflict management	2.0%	13.7%	9.8%	74.5%
Informal training from other staff	2.0%	17.6%	13.7%	66.7%
Training from a line manager	3.9%	11.8%	5.9%	78.4%
Mediation course	.0%	21.2%	11.5%	67.3%
Formal internal course on conflict management	.0%	10.5%	2.6%	86.8%
Course outside work	.0%	13.2%	21.1%	65.8%
Other	6.7%	24.4%	22.2%	46.7%

	Agree	Somewhat	agree	Disagree
	Row N %	Row N %	Row N %	Row N %
If you received conflict training how much do you agree with the following statements about how it made you feel?				

I felt more confident in handling conflict	48.7%	41.0%	10.3%	0%
I felt more determined to avoid conflict	10.3%	43.6%	46.2%	.0%
It made no difference	8.3%	25.0%	66.7%	.0%
It helped me give in more gracefully	6.7%	43.3%	50.0%	.0%
It helped me get what I want from conflict situations	28.6%	35.7%	35.7%	.0%
It helped me get more positive outcomes for both parties	60.0%	26.7%	13.3%	.0%

## Conclusion

This research provides similar results to the much larger CPP Global Human Services Report (2008). It has measured similar levels of time being spent involved in escalated conflict in the workplace in New Zealand to those reported in the CPP Report (2008). It also has similar findings to the CPP Report (2008) with respect to the bottom 10% of respondents experiencing conflict levels approximately four times the average. What this research contributes to the CPP report (2008) is identifying that an equivalent amount of time to that spent in manifest conflict is spent feeling disagreement, or in latent conflict. This implies that the true cost of time spent on workplace conflict in the USA may be twice what CPP estimated.

A second important finding is that most New Zealand employees receive no training in conflict management. As the CPP Report (2008) identifies training as the single most important activity that organisations can engage in to reduce levels of escalated conflict this situation is unfortunate. The CPP report (2008) makes a strong case for organisations to use training as their main tool for dealing with workplace conflict. However this message has apparently not been acted on in New Zealand. As training is a relatively inexpensive solution to what is clearly an extremely expensive problem logic suggests that training staff in how to deal with conflict will become more widespread in New Zealand in the future.

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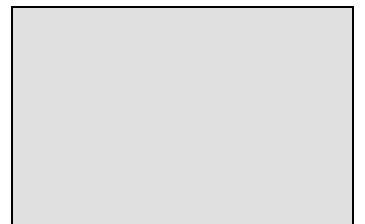
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**Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC)**

**EA1**

**APPLICATION FOR ETHICS APPROVAL FOR RESEARCH PROJECTS**



*Please read the notes at the end of the form before submitting this application.*

## A. General Information

### A.1. Project Title

*If you will be using a different title in documents to that being used as your working title, please provide both, clearly indicating which title will be used for what purpose.*

Dealing with conflict in New Zealand workplaces

### A.2. Applicant Name and Qualifications

*When the researcher is a student (including staff who are AUT students), the applicant is the principal supervisor. When the researcher is an AUT staff member undertaking research as part of employment or a staff member undertaking research as part of an external qualification, the applicant is the researcher. Staff should refer to Section 11.4 of Applying for Ethics Approval: Guidelines and Procedures to check requirements for ethics approval where they are studying at another institution.*

Charles Crothers

### A.3. Applicant's School/Department/Academic Group/Centre

Social Sciences

### A.4. Applicant's Faculty

Applied Humanities

### A.5. Student Details

*Please complete this section only if the research is being undertaken by a student as part of an AUT qualification.*

#### A.5.1. Student Name(s):

Andy Harris

#### A.5.2. Student ID Number(s):

0841110

#### A.5.3. Completed Qualification(s):

## B. Comm

#### B.1.1. E-mail address:

afharris@orcon.net.nz

#### B.1.2. School/Department/Academic Group/Centre

Social Sciences

#### B.1.3. Faculty

Languages and Social Sciences

#### B.1.4. Name of the qualification for which this research is being undertaken:

MA Conflict Resolution

#### B.1.5. Research Output

*Please state whether your research will result in a thesis or dissertation or a research paper or is part of coursework requirements.*

This research will result in a research paper and may result in a thesis

### B.2. Details of Other Researchers or Investigators

*Please complete this section only if other researchers, investigators or organisations are involved in this project. Please also specify the role any other researcher(s), investigator(s) or organisation(s) will have in the research.*

**B.2.1. Individual Researcher(s) or Investigator(s)**

*Please provide the name of each researcher or investigator and the institution in which they research.*

n/a

**B.2.2. Research or Investigator Organisations**

*Please provide the name of each organisation and the city in which the organisation is located.*

**B.3. Are you applying concurrently to another ethics committee?**

*If your answer is yes, please provide full details, including the meeting date, and attach copies of the full application and approval letter if it has been approved.*

No

**B.4. Declaration**

The information supplied is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, accurate. I have read the current Guidelines, published by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee, and clearly understand my obligations and the rights of the participant, particularly with regard to informed consent.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Applicant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

*(In the case of student applications the signature must be that of the Supervisor)*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Student

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

*(If the research is a student project, both the signature of the Supervisor, as the applicant, and the student are required)*

**B.5. Authorising Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Head

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Faculty/Programme/School/Centre

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**C. General Project Information****C.1. Project Duration****C.1.1. Approximate Start Date of Primary Data Collection**

It is anticipated that primary data collection will begin in December 2009

**C.1.2. Approximate Finish Date of Complete Project**

It is anticipated that the project will be completed by the end of February 2009



**C.2. Are funds being obtained specifically for this project?**

*If your answer is yes, then you must complete section G of this Application Form.*

No

**C.3. Types of persons participating as participants**

*Please indicate clearly every one of the following categories that applies to those participating in your research.*

**C.3.1. Researcher's students**

No

**C.3.2. Adults (20 years and above)**

All participants will be adults and will be employed in the workforce in New Zealand

**C.3.3. Legal minors (16 to 20 years old)**

No

**C.3.4. Legal minors (under 16 years old)**

No

**C.3.5. Members of vulnerable groups**

*e.g. persons with impairments, limited understanding, etc. If your answer is yes, please provide a full description.*

No

**C.3.6. Hospital patients**

No

**C.3.7. Prisoners**

No

**C.4. Does this research involve use of human remains, tissue or body fluids which does not require submission to a Regional Ethics Committee?**

*e.g. finger pricks, urine samples, etc. (please refer to section 13 of the AUTECH Guidelines). If your answer is yes, please provide full details of all arrangements, including details of agreements for treatment, etc.*

No

**C.5. Does this research involve potentially hazardous substances?**

*e.g. radioactive materials (please refer to section 15 of the AUTECH Guidelines). If your answer is yes, please provide full details.*

No

**C.6. Research Instruments**

**C.6.1. Does the research include the use of a written or electronic questionnaire or survey?**

*If your answer is yes, please attach to this application form a copy of the finalised questionnaire or survey in the format that it will be presented to participants.*

Yes

**C.6.2. Does the research involve the use of focus groups or interviews?**

*If the answer is yes, please indicate how the data will be recorded (e.g. audiotape, videotape, note-taking). When interviews or focus groups are being recorded, you will need to make sure there is provision for explicit*

consent on the Consent Form and attach to this Application Form examples of indicative questions or the full interview or focus group schedule.

Yes. Qualitative data will be recorded on audio tape

**C.6.3. Does the research involve the use of observation?**

*If the answer is 'Yes', please attach to this application a copy of the observation protocol that will be used.*

No

**C.6.4. Does the research involve the use of other research instruments such as performance tests?**

*If the answer is yes, please attach to this application a copy of the protocols for the instruments and the instruments that will be used to record results.*

No

**C.6.5. Who will be transcribing or recording the data?**

*If someone other than the researcher will be transcribing the interview or focus group records or taking the notes, you need to provide a confidentiality agreement with this Application Form.*

The researcher

**C.7. How does the design and practice of this research implement each of the three principles of the Treaty of Waitangi (Partnership, Participation and Protection) in the relationships between the researcher and other participants?**

*Please refer to Section 2.5 of AUTECH's Applying for Ethics Approval: Guidelines and Procedures (accessible in the Ethics Knowledge Base online via <http://www.aut.ac.nz/about/ethics>) and to the relevant Frequently Asked Questions section in the Ethics Knowledge Base.*

Although the topic is not focused on the Maori population the principles of partnership, participation and protection are implemented in this research. The principle of partnership is reflected in the research as mutual respect will be maintained throughout the duration of this project as the research design encourages participation at a level with which participants feel comfortable. The outcomes of this research have been developed to benefit the participants and their social and cultural groups.

The second principle of participation is reflected in the role of participants. I will carefully watch how participants' respond during the interview process and whether they feel comfortable with my questions. They are given a choice whether they want to talk about their own life or just comment about the research topic in general. They will also be reminded throughout the interview process that they can stop the interview at any stage.

Protection will be ensured by both keeping participants and organisational identities confidential.

**C.8. Does this research target Maori participants?**

No

**C.8.1. If 'Yes', what consultation has been undertaken when designing the research?**

*Please identify the group(s) with whom consultation has occurred and provide evidence of their support and any impact this consultation had on the design of the research. Researchers are advised to read the Health Research Council's Guidelines for researchers on health research involving Maori, available via the Ethics Knowledge Base.*

### **C.9. Does this research target participants of particular cultures or social groups?**

*Please refer to Section 2.5 of AUTECH's Applying for Ethics Approval: Guidelines and Procedures (accessible in the Ethics Knowledge Base online via <http://www.aut.ac.nz/about/ethics>) and to the relevant Frequently Asked Questions section in the Ethics Knowledge Base.*

No

**C.9.1. If 'Yes' please identify which cultures or social groups are being targeted and how their cultures or social groups are being considered in the research design.**

**C.9.2. If your answer to B.9 was 'Yes', what consultation has occurred with these cultures or social groups in the design of the research?**

*Please identify the group(s) with whom consultation has occurred and provide evidence of their support and any impact this consultation had on the design of the research.*

### **C.10. Is there a need for translation or interpreting?**

*If your answer is 'Yes', please provide copies of any translations with this application and any Confidentiality Agreement required for translators or interpreters.*

No

## **D. Project Details**

*Please describe the project details in language which is, as far as possible, free from jargon and comprehensible to lay people.*

### **D.1. Aim of project:**

*Please explain the broad scope and purpose of the project and state concisely how the type of information being sought will achieve the project's aims. Please give the specific hypothesis(es), if any, to be tested.*

The aim of this project is to provide accurate information on workplace conflict in New Zealand

### **D.2. Why are you proposing this research?**

*(ie what are its potential benefits to participants, researcher, wider community, etc?)*

A deeper understanding of workplace conflict will enable strategies to be developed to help combat this problem. If The CPP Global Human Capital Report (2008) US figures are applied to New Zealand it suggests the costs to the New Zealand economy each year from workplace conflict are at least \$US4 Billion and this is just in terms of productive time lost. The total cost of workplace conflict in New Zealand each year is therefore likely to be relatively much more than \$4 Billion US.

Background:

*Please provide sufficient information, including relevant references, to place the project in perspective and to allow the project's significance to be assessed. Where appropriate, provide one or two references to the applicant's (or supervisor's) own published work in the relevant field.*

This research will be based on the Masters and Albright (2002) definition of conflict as occurring wherever disagreement occurs as this definition normalises conflict, addresses the different ways to differentiate conflict and allows workplace conflict to be looked at in the context of general conflict. While workplace conflict is a significant problem, it sits within this broad definition of conflict rather than being a separate category.

The processes available to deal with conflict are covered by the acronym ADR (Lulofs & Cahn, 2000). However to date ADR processes dealing with workplace conflict have not been particularly effective, as according to Masters and Albright (2002) levels of workplace conflict are rising. Doherty and Guyler (2005) and Lipsky et al. (2003) have written books on ADR in the workplace and believe the way to developing workplace harmony is through creating some sort of shift in consciousness. This indicates that ADR by itself is not a solution to the problem. This may explain why there is now a move towards looking at integrating ADR with other approaches such as training (Masters and Albright, 2002).

Conflict can be handled negatively through using the strategies of avoidance, accommodation and competition or positively through using compromise and collaboration (Wertheim et al. 1998). Collaboration is the best strategy as it deals with conflict positively and leads to win-win outcomes (Lulofs & Cahn, 2000). Attempts to manage conflict using a collaborative approach are being recommended by many social scientists (Tillett & French, 2005; Cahn & Abigail, 2007; Wertheim et al. 1998). However despite these attempts the answer to the question of whether it is actually possible to effectively utilise collaborative conflict resolution techniques is a reluctant “not yet” according to the research reviewed. One reason for this is the negotiators dilemma (Witkin, 2008). Another is that the major type of conflict that occurs in the workplace is personality clash (CPP Global Human Capital Report, 2008) and this is very difficult to resolve (Lulofs & Cahn, 2000).

Both the co-resolution process advocated by Witkin (2008) and the collaborative processes advocated by Tillett and French (2005) and Masters and Albright (2002) involve using professional third parties to help resolve conflicts. The problem with these approaches is that rather than addressing the widespread problem of workplace conflict only address the symptoms. The Cahn and Abigail (2007) position, which does not rely on third party professional conflict managers, is better as it has the potential to address the problem.

Quantitative research on workplace conflict occurred in May 2008 when CPP Inc. conducted a research project looking at the issue of workplace conflict. They questioned 5,000 full time employees in nine countries in Europe and the Americas. The CPP Global Human Capital Report (2008) results showed every employee in these nine countries spends on average 2.1 hours each week dealing with conflict. While the value of this time was not calculated for every country it was calculated in the US. The CPP Global Human Capital Report (2008) found that in the US the annual cost of conflict was US\$359,000,000,000.

However this represents only part of the cost of workplace conflict. McCrindle (2004) contends that there are both measurable and immeasurable costs that should be considered. Measurable costs include recruitment costs, staff turnover and training costs, absentee costs, productivity costs and legal costs. Immeasurable costs include lost motivation, damage to the relationship between employers and employees and damage to the relationship between a company and its customers. McCrindle (2004) furthermore points out that the costs of destructive workplace conflict are not limited to the actual sums spent in handling it and do not stop once the conflict is over.

What makes the workplace such a 'ripe breeding ground' for conflict is that there are more sources of conflict in the workplace than in most other areas of our lives. Masters and Albright (2002) explain that in the workplace people are exposed to potential conflicts from environmental, workplace and organisational sources as well as the individual sources of conflict that are predominant in most other aspects of our lives. However according to Liddle (2004) the problem is not conflict itself but the way in which it is handled. This suggests that both the increase in the opportunities for conflict inherent in workplace environments and poor handling of conflict by organisations are factors that have led to workplace conflict becoming such a major problem.

The CPP Global Human Capital Report (2008) shows that the main causes of workplace conflict are personality clashes and warring egos (identified as the primary cause of conflict by 49% of respondents) followed by stress (34%). This demonstrates that workplace conflict to a large degree involves the same issues that arise in conflict in other social environments. Lulofs and Cahn (2000) state that personality conflicts where there is a power imbalance usually result in oppression. This implies that there is likely to be a significant amount of oppression occurring in workplaces because of this dynamic. Lulofs and Cahn (2000) claim that personality clashes also often evolve into moral conflict and become self fuelling and very difficult to resolve.

The CPP Global Human Capital report (2008) found that "Training is the biggest driver for high-quality outcomes from conflict" (CPP Global Human Capital report, 2008 p.3.). In addition to this the report found that 95% of the respondents who had received training agreed that the training they had received had helped them in some way. Furthermore a staggering 58% of those respondents that received training said they now looked for win-win outcomes from conflict. These figures demonstrate that training is highly effective as a tool for dealing with workplace conflict and makes a very compelling argument that it should be widely used. Furthermore the 58% of respondents that said that they now look for win-win outcomes from conflict indicates that training is highly effective in changing staff attitudes about conflict.

However despite the proven effectiveness of training most staff are not trained in conflict resolution. The CPP Global Human Capital report (2008) results showed that 56% of respondents had received no training in conflict resolution at all. Of the 44% of the survey that had received training, 13% had attended an external course, 12% had received some training in this area as part of leadership development and the rest relied on informal peer advice. The report said that 7% of those surveyed had sought help from the Internet on how to manage conflict. The report speculated that this was done in "desperation" at the lack of training that staff had received (CPP Global Human Capital report, 2008, p.14). This general lack of training was described as "lamentable" (CPP Global Human Capital report, 2008, p.15). With the large potential benefits to the bottom line that would result from having more harmonious workplaces together with the high levels of benefit staff report from receiving basic training in this area, the reasons for training staff in how to manage conflict constructively are so strong that this essay agrees with the CPP Global Human Capital report (2008), that the current situation where most staff receive no training in conflict resolution is regrettable.

The CPP Global Human Capital report (2008) featured individual reports on nine countries; Germany, USA, UK, Brazil, Denmark, France, Ireland, Belgium and the Netherlands. The question that this report raised for the researcher was how would New Zealand compare with these countries if a

similar study was done here? This led to my contacting CPP and asking if it was possible to use the same questionnaire in New Zealand as they had used for their report. As CPP will only give a sample containing some of the questions an apples with apples comparison with the data in their report is not possible. Thus in order to help ensure the validity of this study a qualitative aspect has been included in my proposal so that the quantitative results can be assessed in the light of the perspectives of conflict industry professionals. This is the background to this research proposal

### **D.3. Procedure:**

#### **D.3.1. Explain the philosophical and/or methodological approach taken to obtaining information and/or testing the hypothesis(es).**

This research study is a mixed methods which will utilize both quantitative and qualitative research techniques based on positivist and interpretive approaches. Quantitative techniques will be employed in dealing with the answers to the questionnaire. The approach taken will be using SPSS to analyse results descriptively. Frequency distribution and measures of central tendency and dispersion will be paid particular attention. According to Babbie (2007) univariate analysis serves a descriptive rather than explanatory purpose and this is sufficient for this research project. Descriptive multi-variate analyses (eg factor analysis) will extend this.

Qualitative techniques will be employed in dealing with the semi-structured interviews. Coding and analysis will be conducted within a Grounded Theory framework (see Babbie, 2007; Charmaz, 1995; Pidgeon & Henwood, 1997). In essence, this methodology generates theories solely from an analysis of the data rather than by deduction.

#### **D.3.2. State in practical terms what research procedures or methods will be used.**

In practical terms the research will involve a quantitative element, which will be built around a questionnaire that will be given to employees of supportive organisations and has responses that can be easily coded. It will also involve a qualitative element built around semistructured interviews of conflict industry professionals.

#### **D.3.3. State how information will be gathered and processed.**

Quantitative research will be gathered through using an anonymous online questionnaire that will be available through using Survey monkey. It is anticipated that around thirty leading Auckland organisations will be contacted about this research and those that support it will distribute details to their staff. Once the questionnaire has been completed data will be processed through using SPSS. It is expected that multivariate analysis will take place

Qualitative research will be gathered through semi- structured interviews. Once the interviews have been transcribed, the resulting data will be processed via thematic analysis. "Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006:79). This will involve multiple readings of the data and identifying connections, patterns, and themes. Braun and Clarke (2006) discuss what constitutes the prevalence of a theme and emphasise that there is no right and wrong

method for determining prevalence. In this study prevalence will be counted across the entire data set. Included in this data set will not just be the results of the formal interviews but also notes from participant observation. The findings will then be discussed in the context of a broad range of academic literature. The purpose of qualitative research is not to provide a representative sample (see Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

Participants will remain anonymous as real names will not be used in the transcripts. Instead respondents will be given new names. Note-taking will take non-verbal behaviour into account during the interview process. Hopefully the interview method will allow for in-depth discussion on the beliefs and experiences Tibetans have about couple and family relationships. Care will be taken so that the potential power imbalance between the researcher and the clients is minimized.

A Participation Information Sheet and Consent form will be provided, where participants will be expected to read and sign the Consent form before participating in the interview. (see attachment)

#### **D.3.4. State how your data will be analysed.**

Once transcribing has been completed, the interviews will be analysed through a thematic analysis to look for themes from which a framework can be created (Gomm, 2004). Coding and analysis are conducted within a "Grounded Theory" framework (see Charmaz, 1995; Pidgeon & Henwood, 1997). In essence, this methodology consists of a multitude of theoretically directed choices for data gathering and processing.

#### **D.3.5. Provide the statistical or methodological justification for this.**

Grounded theory is widely accepted as a means for analysing qualitative research

### **D.4. References**

*Please include the references for your responses to this section in the standard format used in your discipline.*

- Babbie, E. (2007). *The practice of social research*. United States of America: Thomson Wadsworth.
- Cahn, D. & Abigail, R. (2007). *Managing conflict through communication*. USA: Pearson.
- Charmaz, C. (1995) Grounded Theory. In J.A. Smith, R. Harre and L. Van Langenhove (eds.), *Rethinking Methods in Psychology*. London: Sage.
- CPP Inc. (2008). Global Human Capital Report, July 2008. *Workplace conflict and how businesses can harness it to thrive*. Retrieved September 8 2009 from [http://img.en25.com/Web/ CPP/Conflict\\_report.pdf](http://img.en25.com/Web/ CPP/Conflict_report.pdf)
- Doherty and Guyler (2008). *The essential guide to workplace mediation and conflict resolution*. United Kingdom: Replika Press.
- Lipsky, D., Seeber, R. & Fincher, R. (2003). *Emerging systems for managing workplace conflict*. USA. John Wiley and sons
- Lulofs, R. & Cahn, D. (2000). *Conflict from theory to action*. USA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Masters, M. & Albright, R. (2002). *The complete guide to conflict resolution in the workplace*. New York: American Management Association.

- McCrindle, M. (2004). The costs of conflict. In Heather Falconer (Ed.), *IRS Managing conflict in the workplace*. (pp. 37-58). UK: LexisNexis.
- Pidgeon, N. & Henwood, K. (1997). Grounded Theory: Practical Implementation. In T.E. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research Methods for Psychology and Social Sciences*. London: The British Psychological Society, pp. 86-101
- Tillett, G. & French, B. (2006). *Resolving Conflict*. Australia: Oxford University Press.
- Wertheim, E., Love, A., Peck, C. & Littlefield, A. (1998). *Skills for resolving conflict*. Australia: Eruditions Publishing.
- Witkin, N. (2008). Co-resolution: A cooperative structure for dispute resolution. *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, 26 (2), 239-259. Retrieved August 20 2009 from <http://www3.interscience.wiley.com.ezproxy.aut.ac.nz/cgi-bin/fulltext/121638796/PDFSTART>.

## E. Participants

### E.1. Who are the participants?

Participants for the quantitative research will be employees of organisations in New Zealand. Participants for the qualitative research will be HR and conflict resolution professionals.

#### E.1.1. What criteria are to be used in recruiting the participants?

Criteria for selection for the quantitative research will be that participants are employed in New Zealand in organisations (targeting particularly those with at least fifty staff – to get organisations with an appropriate level of training) and have been employed in their current position for a minimum of one year (to have sufficient possible experience of conflict). As this research cannot occur without the support of the organisations that employ staff the first criteria will be identifying a set of organisations that are prepared to support this research. Once this has occurred then in conjunction with HR departments a random number generator will be used to identify staff that will be asked to complete the questionnaire. Criteria for selection for the qualitative research will be that participants have a minimum of five years experience dealing with workplace conflicts.

#### E.1.2. What criteria are to be used for selecting participants from those recruited?

For the quantitative research participants will be identified by a random number generator. For the qualitative research participants will be selected on the basis of their level of experience in dealing with workplace conflict.

#### E.1.3. Are there any potential participants who will be excluded?

*If your answer is yes, please detail the criteria for exclusion.*

No



**E.2. Are there any potential conflicts of interest or possible coercive influences in the professional, social, or cultural relationships between the researcher and the participants (e.g. dependent relationships such as teacher/student; parent/child; employer/employee; pastor/congregation etc.)?**

No

**E.2.1. If your answer was 'Yes', please identify the nature of the relationships concerned and provide full information about the processes being incorporated into the research design to mitigate any adverse affects that may arise from them.**

**E.3. How many participants will be selected?**

At least 200 will be selected for the quantitative research. 10-15 will be selected for the qualitative research.

**E.3.1. What is the reason for selecting this number?**

If it is assumed that there are over one million people who are in the NZ workforce population size then through using 95% probability and a confidence level of 7 a sample size of 196 can be calculated using free web based software (Creative Research Systems)

**E.3.2. Provide a statistical justification where applicable, if you have not already provided one in C.4 5. above.**

See above

**E.3.3. Is there a control group?**

*If your answer is yes, please describe and state how many are in the control group.*

No. Considerable scope for comparison between firms.

**E.4. Describe in detail the recruitment methods to be used.**

*If you will be recruiting by advertisement or email, please attach a copy to this Application Form*

Recruitment for the quantitative research will be done in conjunction with HR departments of large organisations based in Auckland. See attachment. Qualitative research will be done both in conjunction with HR departments but also through contacting conflict resolution industry bodies and conflict resolution industry professionals.

**E.5. How will information about the project be given to participants?**

*(e.g. in writing, verbally). A copy of information to be given to prospective participants is to be attached to this Application Form. If written information is to be provided to participants, you are advised to use the Information Sheet exemplar.*

Information will be distributed to participants in writing (including by email).

**E.6. Will the participants have difficulty giving informed consent on their own behalf?**

*Consider physical or mental condition, age, language, legal status, or other barriers. If the answer is yes, please provide full details.*

No

**E.6.1. If participants are not competent to give fully informed consent, who will consent on their behalf?**

**E.6.2. Will these participants be asked to provide assent to participation?**

*If the answer is yes, please attach a copy of the assent form which will be used. Please note that assent is not the same as consent (please refer to the Glossary in Appendix A of the AUTC Guidelines and Procedures.*

**E.7. Will consent of participants be gained in writing?**

*If the answer is yes, please attach a copy of the Consent Form which will be used. If the answer is No, please provide the reasons for this.*

Yes

**E.8. Will the participants remain anonymous to the researcher?**

*Please note that anonymity and confidentiality are different. If the answer is yes, please state how, otherwise, if the answer is no, please describe how participant privacy issues and confidentiality of information will be preserved.*

Yes with the quantitative research. No with the qualitative research.

**E.9. In the final report will there be any possibility that individuals or groups could be identified?**

*If the answer is yes, please explain how and why this will happen.*

No

**E.10. Will feedback or findings be disseminated to participants (individuals or groups)?**

*If the answer is yes, please explain how this will occur and ensure that this information is included in the Information Sheet.*

A summary of results will be offered.

**E.11. Will the findings of this study be of particular interest to specific cultures or social groups?**

*If your answer is 'Yes', please identify how the findings will be made available to them.*

It will be of general interest; especially to HR Professionals.

## **F. Other Project Details**

**F.1. Where will the project be conducted?**

*Please provide the name/s of the Institution/s, town/s, city or cities, region or country that best answers this question.*

In workplaces in Auckland where the HR departments agree to support the quantitative project. In the offices of the participants with the qualitative research.

**F.2. Who is in charge of data collection?**

Andy Harris

**F.3. Who will interact with the participants?**

Andy Harris

#### **F.4. What ethical risks are involved for participants in the proposed research?**

*Please consider the possibility of moral, physical, psychological or emotional risks to participants, including issues of confidentiality and privacy. Researchers are urged to consider this issue from the perspective of the participants, and not only from the perspective of someone familiar with the subject matter and research practices involved.*

The quantitative research will not expose participants to moral physical, psychological or emotional risks. Even though the participants in the qualitative research will all be experienced professionals in conflict resolution there is potential for them to become upset in talking about conflicts that they have been involved in.

##### **F.4.1. Are the participants likely to experience any discomfort, embarrassment (physical, psychological, social) or incapacity as a result of the research's procedures?**

The quantitative research will not expose participants to moral physical, psychological or emotional risks. Even though the participants in the qualitative research will all be experienced professionals in conflict resolution there is potential for them to become upset in talking about conflicts that they have been involved in.

##### **F.4.2. If there are risks, please identify their probability and describe how they will be mitigated.**

*Please describe how these will be minimised or mitigated (e.g. participants do not need to answer a question that they*

*find embarrassing or they may terminate an interview or there may be a qualified counsellor present in the interview or the findings will be reported in a way that ensures that participants cannot be individually identified, etc.) Possible risks and their mitigation should be fully described in the Information Sheets for participants.*

As the interviews will only take place with experienced conflict management professionals it is highly unlikely they will suffer emotional distress from talking about the areas that they work in. Participants can withdraw at any stage and the university counselling service have written a letter attached to this explanation detailing how that will help if there is a problem.

##### **F.4.3. If the participants are likely to experience any discomfort, embarrassment, or incapacity, what provision for counselling has been made, either with AUT Counselling (who also provide an online service) or with other counselling professionals (this is to be at no charge to the participants)?**

*Please refer to section 2.3 of AUTECH's Applying for Ethics Approval: Guidelines and Procedures in the Ethics Knowledge Base. If the answer is No, please explain the arrangements which have been made to have qualified personnel available to deal with unexpected adverse physical or psychological consequences?*

Please see attached letter from AUT Student services

#### **F.5. What risks are involved for the researcher(s) in the proposed project (such as physical, social, psychological, or safety risks)?**

*If this project will involve interviewing participants in private homes, undertaking research overseas, or going into similarly vulnerable situations, then a Researcher Safety protocol should be designed and appended to this application.*

There appear to be no special risks to the researcher in carrying out this research

**F.6. Will there be any other physical hazards introduced to AUT staff and/or students through the duration of this project?**

*If the answer is yes, please provide details of management controls which will be in place to either eliminate or minimise harm from these hazards (e.g. a hazardous substance management plan).*

No

**F.7. Is deception of participants involved at any stage of the research?**

*If the answer is yes, please provide full details of and rationale for the deception. Please refer to Section 2.4 of AUTEK's Applying for Ethics Approval: Guidelines and Procedures when considering this question.*

No

**F.8. How much time will participants have to give to the project?**

The quantitative research will require approximately 20 minutes. The qualitative research will require between 40 and 60 minutes.

**F.9. Will any information on the participants be obtained from third parties?**

*If the answer is yes, please provide full details. This includes use of third parties, such as employers, in recruitment.*

Yes. HR departments will help sample participants in the quantitative research. HR departments and recognised conflict industry professionals will help identify participants in the qualitative research.

**F.10. Will any identifiable information on the participants be given to third parties?**

*If the answer is Yes, please provide full details.*

No

**F.11. Provide details of any payment, gift or koha and, where applicable, level of payment to be made to participants.**

*Please refer to Section 2.1 of the AUTEK's Applying for Ethics Approval: Guidelines and Procedures and Appendix A of that document for AUTEK's policy on Payment and Koha, especially in relation to recruitment.*

## **G. Data and Consent Forms**

**G.1. Who will have access to the data?**

The researcher and supervisor will have access.

**G.2. Are there plans for future use of the data beyond those already described?**

*The applicant's attention is drawn to the requirements of the Privacy Act 1993 (see Appendix I). If there are future plans for the use of the data, then this needs to be explained in the Information Sheets for participants.*

The results may be incorporated into a thesis by the researcher

**G.3. Where will the data be stored once the analysis is complete?**

*Please provide the exact storage location. AUTEK normally requires that the data be stored securely on AUT premises in a location separate from the consent forms. If you are proposing an alternative arrangement, please explain why.*

It will be securely stored on AUT premises by supervisor in a locked cabinet.

**G.4. For how long will the data be stored after completion of analysis?**

*AUTEK normally requires that the data be stored securely for six years. If you are proposing an alternative arrangement, please explain why.*

Six years

**G.5. Will the data be destroyed?**

*If the answer is yes, please describe how the destruction will be effected. If the answer is no, please provide the reason for this.*

Yes. It will be shredded.

**G.6. Who will have access to the Consent Forms?**

Andy Harris

**G.7. Where will the completed Consent Forms be stored?**

*Please provide the exact storage location. AUTEK normally requires that the Consent Forms be stored securely on AUT premises in a location separate from the data. If you are proposing an alternative arrangement, please explain why.*

It will be securely stored on AUT premises by supervisor in a separate locked cabinet to the cabinet containing the Data.

**G.8. For how long will the completed Consent Forms be stored?**

*AUTEK normally requires that the Consent Forms be stored securely for six years. If you are proposing an alternative arrangement, please explain why.*

Six years

**G.9. Will the Consent Forms be destroyed?**

*If the answer is yes, please describe how the destruction will be effected. If the answer is no, please provide the reason for this.*

Yes . They will be shredded

## **H. Material Resources**

**H.1. Has an application for financial support for this project been (or will be) made to a source external to AUT or is a source external to AUT providing (or will provide) financial support for this project?**

**H.1.1.** If the answer to G.1 was 'yes', please provide the name of the source, the amount of financial support involved, and clearly explain how the funder/s are involved in the design and management of the research.

**H.2. Has the application been (or will it be) submitted to an AUT Faculty Research Grants Committee or other AUT funding entity?**

*If the answer is yes, please provide details.*

Yes. An application has both been made and been approved for a summer studentship.

**H.2.1.** If the answer to G.2 was 'yes', please provide the name of the source, the amount of financial support involved, and clearly explain how the funder/s are involved in the design and management of the research.

**H.3. Is funding already available, or is it awaiting decision?**

*Please provide full details.*

**H.4. Please provide full details about the financial interest, if any, in the outcome of the project of the researchers, investigators or research organisations mentioned in Part A of this application.**

There is no financial interest by any person or organisation in the results of this research.

**I. Other Information**

**I.1. Have you ever made any other related applications?**

*If the answer is yes, please provide the AUTECH application / approval number(s)*

No

**J. Checklist**

*Please ensure all applicable sections of this form have been completed and all appropriate documentation is attached as incomplete applications will not be considered by AUTECH.*

Section A	General Information Completed	Y
	Signatures/Declaration Completed	Y
Section B	Project General Information Completed	Y
Section C	Project Details Completed	Y
Section D	Participant Details Completed	Y
Section E	Other Project Details Completed	Y
Section F	Data & Consent Forms Details Completed	Y
Section G	Material Resources Completed	Y
Section H	Other Information Completed	Y

Spelling and Grammar Check (please note that a high standard of spelling and grammar is required in documents that are issued with AUTECH approval)

**Attached Documents (where applicable)**

Participant Information Sheet(s)	Y
Consent Form(s)	Y
Questionnaire(s)	Y
Indicative Questions for Interviews or Focus Groups	Y

Observation Protocols

Recording Protocols for Tests

Advertisement(s)

Hazardous Substance Management Plan

Any Confidentiality Agreement(s)

Other Documentation

Y

*Before submitting this application, please note the following:*

- ❖ *If you think that your research may be of low ethical risk, use the EA8RA self assessment form to make sure that this is the correct form for your application;*
- ❖ *Incomplete or incorrectly formatted applications will not be considered by AUTECH;*
- ❖ *Please check online for the most recent version of this form before submitting your application;*
- ❖ *Please do not alter the formatting of this form or delete any sections. If a particular question is not applicable to your research, please state that as your response to that question;*

*This form needs to be submitted, along with all associated documents as follows:*

- ❖ *In printed form;*
- ❖ *With the required signatures in sections A.8 and A.9;*
- ❖ *Single sided;*
- ❖ *Using clips rather than staples;*
- ❖ *By 4 pm on the agenda closing date at:*

*The AUTECH Secretariat  
Room WO201, WO Building  
56 Wakefield Street, City Campus.*

- ❖ *The Internal Mail Code is D-89. If sending applications by Internal Mail, please ensure that they are posted at least two days earlier to allow for any delay that may occur.*





## **1. Participant consent form for questionnaire**

### **1. Project Title:**

Exploring workplace conflict in New Zealand.

### **2. Researchers**

Andy Harris a post graduate student enrolled with Auckland University of Technology.

### **3. Venue:**

Questionnaires will be distributed to staff at XYZ Ltd and collected one week later. Completed questionnaires can be deposited in a sealed box at the HR office of XYZ Ltd or handed to the researcher when he visits to collect the questionnaires. OR

Potential respondents will be emailed an invitation and URL and asked to fill out a web-based questionnaire.

### **4. Aims and purpose of study:**

The aim of this study is to explore employee's experiences of workplace conflict at XYZ Ltd. This information will be important in obtaining information about: the levels of workplace conflict in New Zealand, the main types of workplace conflict, the main results of workplace conflict, levels of training in conflict resolution in workplaces and effectiveness of this training. The purpose of this research is both to evaluate the size of the workplace conflict problem in New Zealand as well as the features of workplace conflict that are similar and dissimilar to the results of international studies.

### **5. Description of inconvenience:**

There are no real or potential hazards anticipated for anyone taking part in this study. You will have full control over what and how much information you wish to share with the researcher. All identities of those involved in this research will remain confidential.

## 6. Ethical Issues:

I (the interviewee) am aware that I will be involved in completing a questionnaire. I will have the opportunity to view all the material concerning my questionnaire and am free to edit or make changes in any way to the information that I have supplied for the research during this process.

- I have read and understood the information sheet and consent form and have had the opportunity to discuss the study with the researcher Andy Harris.
- I know that I may withdraw from the study at any time.
- I understand that this study has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee at Auckland University of Technology and if I have any concerns about the study I may contact the Ethics Committee, Auckland University of Technology on 09 456 0000

I \_\_\_\_\_ (full name) hereby consent to take part in this study.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Andy Harris

Ph: 09 4452045



## **2. Participant consent form for interviews**

### **1. Project Title:**

Exploring workplace conflict in New Zealand.

### **2. Researcher**

Andy Harris a post graduate student enrolled with Auckland University of Technology.

### **3. Venue:**

Individual interviews and group interviews will take place at the premises of XYZ Ltd.

### **4. Aims and purpose of study:**

The aim of this study is to explore conflict resolution professionals' experiences of workplace conflict in New Zealand. This information will be important in identifying strategies that have worked in resolving workplace conflicts in New Zealand as well as strategies that have not worked in resolving workplace conflicts in New Zealand. Furthermore, this research should help identify the main types of workplace conflict, the main results of workplace conflict, effectiveness of ADRs in dealing with workplace conflict, levels of training in conflict resolution in workplaces and effectiveness of this training. The purpose of this research is both to evaluate the size of the workplace conflict problem in New Zealand as well as the features of workplace conflict that are similar and dissimilar to the results of international studies.

#### **5. Description of inconvenience:**

There are no real or potential hazards anticipated for anyone taking part in this study. You will have full control over what and how much information you wish to share with the researcher. All identities of those involved in this research will remain confidential.

#### **6. Ethical Issues:**

I (the interviewee) am aware that I will be involved in an individual interview. I understand that the interviews are being audio taped and transcribed and that the information from the interview will be used to write a report. I understand that my comments may be used in the report but my identity will be kept confidential. I understand that this information will be retained for two years and then be destroyed. I understand that this information will be stored in a locked filing cabinet at the home of the interviewer during this time.

I will have the opportunity to view all the material concerning my interview and am free to edit or make changes in any way to the information that I have supplied for the research.

- I have read and understood the information sheet and consent form and have had the opportunity to discuss the study with the researcher Andy Harris.
- I know that I may withdraw from the study at any time.
- I understand that this study has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee at Auckland University of Technology and if I have any concerns about the study I may contact the Ethics Committee, Auckland University of Technology on 09 456 0000

I \_\_\_\_\_ (full name) hereby consent to take part in this study.

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

Andy Harris

Ph: 09 4452045

## The Questionnaire

The questionnaire is still being finalised but will include the following questions.

1. What level of the organisation do you work at?
  - a. Entry level
  - b. Line manager level
  - c. Middle manager level

- d. Senior manager level
- 2. At what level of the organisation do you observe the most conflict?
  - a. Entry level
  - b. At line manager level
  - c. At middle manager level
  - d. At senior manager level
- 3. How long have you worked for the organisation that you currently work for?
  - a. 1-2 years
  - b. 2-3 years
  - c. 3-4 years
  - d. 4-5 years
  - e. More than five years
- 4. What sector do you work in?
  - a. Manufacturing
  - b. Human Services
  - c. Retail
  - d. Finance
  - e. Other
- 5. Do you ever have to deal with conflict in the workplace?
  - a- Yes always
  - b- Yes frequently
  - c- Yes occasionally
  - d- No, never
  - e- Don't know
- 6. In a typical day I spend the following amount of time involved in disagreements and conflicts
  - a- Less than 5 minutes
  - b- 5-10 Minutes
  - c- 10-20 Minutes
  - d- 20-30 Minutes

- e- 30-40 Minutes
- f- 40-50 Minutes
- g- 50-60 Minutes
- h- More than 60 Minutes. Please specify.....minutes

7. What do you observe to be the main cause of conflict at work?

- a. Personality clashes and warring egos
- b. Stress
- c. Workloads
- d. Clash of values
- e. Poor management
- f. Lack of honesty

8. Whose job do you think it is to manage conflict?

- a. Everyone
- b. Line managers
- c. Those involved
- d. Senior Managers
- e. Conflict professionals

9. What is the single most important thing that could be done to help with conflict management? Tick all that are appropriate

- a. Better leadership from top
- b. Better leadership from line managers
- c. More clearly defined roles
- d. Better conflict management services
- e. Better role clarity
- f. Better staff empowerment
- g. Address underlying tensions before conflict erupts

10. Who handles conflict in your organisation the most effectively?

- a. Senior management
- b. Line management
- c. Human resources
- d. No one

11. Have you experienced a workplace conflict that has escalated?

- a. Yes
- b. No

12. Have you seen a conflict result in staff taking time off sick?

- a. Yes
- b. No

13. Have you seen a conflict result in verbal or physical aggression?

- a. Yes
- b. No

14. Have you seen a conflict become inter departmental?

- a. Yes
- b. No

15. Have you seen a conflict result in people leaving the organisation?

- a. Yes
- b. No

16. Have you seen a conflict result in a project failure?

- a. Yes
- b. No

17. Have you seen a conflict result in people being transferred to different departments?

- a. Yes
- b. No

18. Have you seen a conflict result in people being fired?

- a. Yes
- b. No



19. Have you gone out of your way to avoid a colleague following a conflict?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
20. Have you stayed away from a work related social event because of conflict?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
21. How does Conflict make you feel-tick all that are appropriate?
- a. Demotivated
  - b. Angry and frustrated
  - c. Nervous
  - d. Stressed
  - e. Nothing
  - f. Confident
  - g. Excited
  - h. Energised
22. If you are a manager how well do you think you do at resolving workplace conflicts?
- a. I do a great job
  - b. I do a good job
  - c. I do my best
  - d. I find it difficult
  - e. I try to avoid doing this.
23. Who do you think handles conflict the best?
- a. Older people
  - b. Younger people
  - c. Men
  - d. Women
  - e. Those who are more senior
  - f. Those who are more junior

24. In a conflict that you have been involved in which of the following did you experience?

- a. A positive outcome
- b. A negative outcome
- c. Better understanding
- d. Improved work relationships
- e. Higher performance
- f. A better team environment

25. Do you handle workplace conflicts differently now than earlier in your career?

- a. No they affect me the same as they always have
- b. They get to me less
- c. I am more proactive
- d. I'm less likely to cause a fuss
- e. I now seek advice from colleagues
- f. I Now seek advice from people outside work
- g. I appreciate the value of conflict more
- h. I have learned not to win

26. What forms of training in conflict management have you received?

- a. Management course
- b. Training course
- c. Counselling
- d. No training

27. If you received conflict training how did it make you feel?

- a. More confident in handling conflict
- b. More determined to avoid conflict
- c. It helped me get more positive outcomes for both parties
- d. It helped me get what I want from conflict situations
- e. It helped me give in more gracefully

28. Have you received conflict training as part of a leadership course?

- a. Yes
- b. No

29. Have you received conflict training from an external course in conflict management?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
30. Have you received conflict training informally from peers?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
31. Have you received conflict training from a line manager?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
32. Have you received conflict training advice from the internet?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
33. Have you received conflict training from a mediation course?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
34. Have you received conflict training from a formal internal course on conflict management?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
35. Have you received conflict training from course outside work?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
36. Have you received no conflict management training?
- a. Yes
  - b. No



## Qualitative

The interview process will seek to identify narratives showing both how conflict in a New Zealand workplace has been successfully and unsuccessfully managed. Questions will include:

- Tell me about a workplace conflict that you have been involved in that ended successfully?
- Tell me about a workplace conflict that you have been involved in that ended unsuccessfully?
- What strategies were used in both conflicts?
- Which strategies worked and why?
- Which strategies did not work and why?
- Why do you think the conflict was successfully/unsuccessfully resolved?
- What are the main types of workplace conflict that you deal with and what percentage of your time approximately is spent on each type?
- What types of training in conflict management have been given to staff at your organisation?
- If staff received training was there a noticeable difference in conflict behaviour by those staff after the training?
- Did this change last?

## **Information sheet for questionnaire**

### **K. Date Information Sheet Produced:**

27 September 2009

### **L. Project Title**

Dealing with conflict in the New Zealand workplace

### **M. An Invitation**

My name is Andy Harris and I am currently undertaking postgraduate research at AUT in conflict Resolution. I am inviting you to participate in this study which will provide information that will be used both as a research project in its own right and will also be included in my Masters thesis. Your assistance is greatly appreciated. Participation is entirely voluntary and you have the right to withdraw from this study without having to provide a reason. You will not be disadvantaged in any way should you choose to withdraw.

### **N. What is the purpose of this research?**

This study sets out to explore workplace conflict in New Zealand. This is because workplace conflict is a massive problem globally and there is a shortage of information about how this problem manifests in New Zealand. What research has recently identified is that despite the efforts organisations are making to manage conflict the problem is continuing to get worse. This means that further work needs to occur to discover why this problem is getting worse. This research is an effort to explore workplace conflict in New Zealand to see if New Zealand experience can contribute to helping find a solution to this problem.

### **O. How was I chosen for this invitation?**

You have been chosen for this study because you work for an organisation that wishes to contribute to this research and have been working for more than twelve months for this organisation.

### **P. What will happen in this research?**

If you are selected to participate in the interview for this study, you will be given a questionnaire that you will have one week to complete.

### **Q. What are the discomforts and risks?**

This study seeks to gain an understanding of the way conflict manifests and is managed in New Zealand workplaces. The disclosure of such information may recall memories which can cause emotional discomfort.

## **R. How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?**

If you feel any discomfort with the questionnaire you may refuse to answer questions.

## **S. What are the benefits?**

The benefits for you could include that workplace conflict dynamics at your organisation are improved. Your organisation stands to benefit from having a happy harmonious workplace and while this is a very difficult goal to achieve there is little doubt that the path towards this goal involves getting reliable information about workplace conflict dynamics.

Your participation in this research would also be of great benefit to the researcher as he wants to generate reliable research on workplace conflict in New Zealand.

## **T. How will my privacy be protected?**

All information you provide in answering the questionnaire will be completely confidential, and your name will not be used in this study. Your identity will not be disclosed. Privacy and confidentiality will be respected.

## **U. What are the costs of participating in this research?**

There is no cost to you for participating in this study, other than your time. The questionnaire is likely to take about twenty minutes of your time.

## **V. What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?**

From when you receive the questionnaire you will have one week before it is due to be returned. You can consider this invitation for that week. If you are interested in participating please contact me as soon as possible.

## **W. How do I agree to participate in this research?**

If you wish to participate in this study, please contact me by email, [afharris@orcon.net.nz](mailto:afharris@orcon.net.nz) or phone, 4452045. Prior to being given the questionnaire, you will be required to complete a Consent Form. This will be provided.

## **X. Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?**

My intention is to make a summary of the results of this study available to your organisation and also to include these results in a Masters thesis.

## **Y. What do I do if I have concerns about this research?**

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary, AUTECH, Madeline Banda, [madeline.banda@aut.ac.nz](mailto:madeline.banda@aut.ac.nz), 921 9999 ext 8044.

## **Z. Who do I contact for more information**

Andy Harris 021 2772271, Professor Charles Crothers AUT University 9219999 ext 8468



## **Information sheet for interviews**

### **A. Date information sheet produced**

23 September 2009

### **AA. Project Title**

Dealing with conflict in the New Zealand workplace

### **BB. An Invitation**

My name is Andy Harris and I am currently undertaking postgraduate research at AUT In conflict Resolution. I am inviting you to participate in this study which will provide information that will be used both as a research project in its own right and will also be included in my Masters thesis. Your assistance is greatly appreciated. Participation is entirely voluntary and you have the right to withdraw from this study without having to provide a reason. You will not be disadvantaged in any way should you choose to withdraw.



### **CC. What is the purpose of this research?**

This study sets out to explore workplace conflict in New Zealand. This is because workplace conflict is a massive problem globally and there is a shortage of information about how this problem manifests in New Zealand. What research has recently identified is that despite the efforts organisations are making to manage conflict the problem is continuing to get worse. This means that further work needs to occur to discover why this problem is getting worse. This research is an effort to explore workplace conflict in New Zealand to see if New Zealand experience can contribute to helping find a solution to this problem.

### **DD. How was I chosen for this invitation?**

You have been chosen for this study because you are a conflict resolution professional.

### **EE. What will happen in this research?**

If you are selected to participate in the interview for this study, you will be given the opportunity to discuss your experiences, feelings and beliefs on conflict resolution. This interview will take 30-60 minutes. Participation is voluntary. This interview will be audio-taped (if you agree to that) and you may have your responses withdrawn any time before the completion of data collection.

### **FF. What are the discomforts and risks?**

This study seeks to gain an in-depth understanding of both successful and unsuccessful workplace conflict resolution strategies in New Zealand. The disclosure of such information may recall memories which can cause emotional discomfort.

### **GG. How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?**

If you feel any discomfort during the interview you may refuse to answer questions. You will also be able to have responses withdrawn whenever you like prior to the completion of data collection.

### **HH. What are the benefits?**

The benefits for you could include that workplace conflict dynamics are improved. Your participation may reveal information that helps improve workplace harmony in New Zealand. While this is a very difficult goal to achieve there is little doubt that the path towards this goal involves getting reliable information about workplace conflict dynamics.

The benefits for you could include the opportunity of having your story heard and acknowledged. It is also the opportunity of making a real difference by contributing to a research topic where there is not much research available.

Your participation in this research would also be of great benefit to the researcher as he wants to generate reliable research on workplace conflict in New Zealand.

## **II. How will my privacy be protected?**

All information you provide in the interview will be completely confidential, and your name will not be used in this study. Your identity will not be disclosed. Privacy and confidentiality will be respected.

**JJ. What are the costs of participating in this research?**

There is no cost to you for participating in this study, other than your time. Interviews will take approximately 30-60 minutes of your time. It is possible that a follow up interview will be needed but if this occurs it will take no longer than fifteen minutes.

**KK. What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?**

Interviews will not commence until early 2010. If you are interested in participating please contact me as soon as possible.

**LL. How do I agree to participate in this research?**

If you wish to participate in this study, please contact me by email, [afharris@orcon.net.nz](mailto:afharris@orcon.net.nz) phone 4452045. Prior to being interviewed, you will be required to complete a Consent Form. This will be provided before the interview.

**MM. Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?**

My intention is to make the results of this study available to your organisation and also to include these results in a Masters thesis.

**NN. What do I do if I have concerns about this research?**

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary, AUTEK, Madeline Banda, [madeline.banda@aut.ac.nz](mailto:madeline.banda@aut.ac.nz) , 921 9999 ext 8044.

**OO. Who do I contact for more information**

Andy Harris 4452045, Professor Charles Crothers AUT University 9219999



## MEMORANDUM

**To** Andy Harris

**CC**

**FROM** Stella McFarlane

**SUBJECT** AUT Counselling services for research participants

**DATE** 28<sup>th</sup> September 2009

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Dear Andy

As manager of AUT Health Counselling and Wellbeing, I would like to confirm that we are able to offer confidential counselling support for the participants in your AUT research project entitled: *Workplace Conflict*

The free counselling will be provided by our professional counsellors for a maximum of three sessions and must be in relation to issues arising from their participation in your research project.

Please inform your participants:

- They will need to drop into our centres at WB219 or AS104 or phone 921 9992 City Campus or 921 9998 North Shore campus to make an appointment
- They will need to let the receptionist know that they are a research participant
- They will need to provide your contact details to confirm this
- They can find out more information about our counsellors and the option of online counselling on our website  
[http://www.aut.ac.nz/students/student\\_services/health\\_counselling\\_and\\_wellbeing](http://www.aut.ac.nz/students/student_services/health_counselling_and_wellbeing)

Current AUT students and staff also have access to our counsellors as part of our normal service delivery.

Yours sincerely

Stella McFarlane

Manager

Health, Counselling and Wellbeing

